

## Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 3)

Disintegration of Christianity

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I have been focusing on a subject that I titled "Is What We Believe Really All That Important?" That question came to mind as I read two articles dealing with the shocking disclosures of the George Barna poll of "born again" Christians. This poll revealed that, despite these peoples' claims that they are Christians, they feel free to reject a clear biblical teaching, and thus they establish their own personal religion. I am sure that these people do not believe they are establishing their own religion, but that is the effect of what they are doing.

About eight or nine days ago an article appeared in the ZENIT News Agency of the Roman Catholic Church titled "Atheism Fading, But So Too Is Religious Fervor." The subtitle of this article is "Data Reveal Belief Without Belonging," dated March 11, 2004. I am going to read to you a few excerpts from this article. I want you to keep in mind that you are hearing something that is an official publication of the Roman Catholic Church. There is no by-line.

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 11, 2004 - Research carried out by the Pontifical Council for Culture reveals that atheism is receding while religious indifference and "alternative religions" are growing.

The pontifical council conducted a worldwide survey on unbelief and religious indifference to prepare for its plenary assembly, which runs today through Saturday in the Vatican.

"From the militant and organized atheism of other times there has been a move to a situation of practical indifference, of the loss of importance of the question of God, and of abandonment of religious practice, especially in the Western world," the presentation of the council's report pointed out.

Yet, this trend is not a question of "abandonment of belief in God," the report said.

What they are finding is something very similar to what the Barna poll found amongst Protestants. The Vatican calls it "religious indifference," in which people believe that God exists, but they no longer feel tied, for whatever the reason, to the doctrine of the

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church, or to the Bible directly.

Continuing quoting from the article:

"Religious indifference or practical atheism is growing. Agnostics and non-practicing believers tend to be mixed in an environment where people live, in fact, as if God did not exist."

"Also growing is a more spiritual rather than religious search, which does not always coincide with a return to traditional religious practices."

This article from the Catholic Church survey of its own people is saying essentially the same thing as the Barna poll. Those surveyed would never say that they do not believe that God exists, but in practical fact they do not believe God, except in those circumstances or those teachings that *they* personally feel comfortable with.

What is revealed is worldwide confusion, triggered by distrust. We are witnessing in our time "every man doing what is right in his own eyes" on a worldwide basis. This same phenomenon occurred in the first century as well, and the epistles of the apostles reveals very much of what they were attempting to focus their writings on.

One of the clear statements in regard to what is going on, and at the same time what needs to be done, appears in Jude verse 3. I want to read that to you.

**Jude 3** Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude only confirms what John wrote about, what Peter wrote about, what James wrote about, and what Paul wrote about—that people were drifting away from the teachings of the apostles into some other, or maybe some others' religious beliefs and practices.

Now God, the Bible, and Christianity are undergoing a public onslaught against them that we here in the United States anyway have never had to face before. I want us to be aware so that we are not complacent. I use this term "complacent." The Catholic Church used the word "indifferent."

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I have another article that I am going to read later in which the man uses the word "complacent." As far as I know he is not a religious person, but a newspaper and magazine writer. He sees what is happening, not so much in the area of religion, but what is simply happening in the culture, and he uses terminology very similar to what these religious writers are saying. I want us to be aware so as not to be complacent, but *fighting* (Jude says here "contending") to hang onto, to hold fast to what was delivered to us, because something much worse is appearing on the horizon. In fact it has already appeared. It is already well under way even in the United States of America.

A couple of weeks ago, on March 4, 2004, John and Delores Reid were listening to Dr. Laura Schlessinger, when a lady called in and remarked that God did not hesitate to punish Jonah whenever he disobeyed Him. Dr. Laura's response was: "All that business about the whale and Jonah being in the belly, you don't really believe that, do you? That was only an allegory."

To me this is a perfect illustration on the past two sermons that I have been giving. Dr. Laura feels comfortable with rejecting God telling us that story is *literal*—a real occurrence. Somehow or another it escapes her that she can believe in God, who God created all things, and that He gave and sustains her life, and yet at the same time fails to grasp how small her concept of God is, and how shallow her thinking is regarding what He is able to do, and what He has done in the affairs of men.

On the other hand, to her, men can design and build a submarine of steel, put men in its belly, transport them under water in order to carry out a job, dumping them on the shore wherever they happen to want to go. Men can put other men in a small capsule and transport them to the moon and back again, but somehow the Great God, who made the entire universe, cannot prepare a special fish to carry one man and transport him to where He wants him to be in order to carry out a job.

The sum and the substance of what Dr. Laura did was to subtract from the Scriptures. But then again we have Mel Gibson, in "The Passion of the Christ," who seriously *added* to the Scriptures. In at least fifteen areas he inserted strictly Catholic non-scriptural events, or added to the biblical crucifixion account and presented to the public as though they were *included* within the biblical account.

People are unable, it seems, to believe the Scriptures can stand on their own. God is well aware of this, and He has warned Israel and the church many times about this area of unbelief, of not thinking of Him in a literal basis where literality is called for. In Deuteronomy 4:1-2 God says:

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**Deuteronomy 4:1** Now therefore hearken [listen!] O Israel, ...

Parents, how many times have you said that to your children? "Listen to me now. I want you to do exactly what I tell you."

**Deuteronomy 4:1-2** Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers gives you. You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

There is a simple equation: "Listen! Do not add or subtract so that you can do what I want you to do."

**Deuteronomy 12:32** What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

The Israelites go through the wilderness, and just before they went into the land God said to Joshua "Only be you strong and very courageous." That is an interesting beginning to what He is going to command them now. God understands humanity, and He understands human nature. He understands that it is not always going to be easy for us to do what He wants us to do. Sometimes it is going to take a great deal of courage to do what He says to do in the face of opposition, in the face of persecution, and so He is admonishing Joshua to "be strong and **very** courageous."

**Joshua 1:7** Only be you [Joshua] strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper whithersoever you go.

These two polls—one survey taken by the Catholic Church and the other taken by what amounts to the Protestant church—find that in both those organizations the people are taking liberties to do what **they** want to do based upon what **they** want to believe, and so a great deal of picking and choosing of teaching is going on.

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We are going to go back to the book of Proverbs, to the time of Solomon. God, through Solomon, warned once again.

**Proverbs 30:5** Every word of God is pure.

What can you add to something that is already pure?

**Proverbs 30:5-6** Every word of God is pure. He is a shield [a protector] unto them that put their trust in him. Add you not unto his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.

We are going to jump all the way now to the book of Revelation. This one is kind of interesting because of where it appears. Practically the last thing out of His mouth to mankind is the same command.

**Revelation 22:18-19** For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

And so we see, in a general way, that instead of merely expounding, that there is a tendency to embellish, as Mel Gibson did. But it leads to one of those cases where *more* is actually less, and quality conversions will not be produced from something that is defiled by men's unholy minds.

When we closed the last sermon, I had concluded that the report from the George Barna poll of "born again" Christians clearly established that sincere, zealously religious, undoubtedly fine people—but nonetheless thoroughly deceived people here in America—feel comfortable with rejecting major doctrines Jesus clearly taught. I mean something as clear as His resurrection.

I think it was thirty percent of these people polled did not believe that Jesus was resurrected. To them, their religion is a personal, subjective experience, rather than an objective seeking of God-given truth for the purpose of conforming their understanding and practice to what *He* instructs and commands for their well-being.

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How many times in these five or six scriptures that we just read did He say something similar to "that it might be **well** with you," or "that you might **go** into the land," or that "you might **be** in the Kingdom of God"? Thus they feel free to practice what amounts to creating their own personal religion.

This most certainly fits a pattern that we do not want to allow ourselves to slide into. The theological reason for **strenuously** avoiding this is incredibly easy to understand. I want to go to I John 2:6. It is interesting that every one of the apostles who wrote touched on this subject that we are on.

**I John 2:6** He that says he abides in him [he that *claims* that he is a Christian; he that says he is a follower of Jesus Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

That is pretty simple to understand, is it not? That is very clear that we have to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ if we are going to rightly claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In I John 3:1-3, John carries it a little bit further.

**I John 3:1-3** Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

If we do not have the same faith that He had—that is, the same body of beliefs—we will not walk the same way that He walked, and therefore we will not be like Him, and we will not be there.

I am not talking about doing things to the perfection that Jesus did, because we are never going to do it. I am talking of having the mind, the heart, the attitude, and the will to follow what we already know and believe, and **do it**, and seeking always to add to that faith—that same body of beliefs—the truth that Jesus Himself believed in. I am not talking about perfection. I **am** talking about believing in and practicing to the very best of our ability what we already have, and not fighting against the truth that we do not yet grasp or understand.

This pattern of rejection is what Israel has always done, as the Bible shows. We will get

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to this a little bit later. It is what they did in the wilderness. It is what Israel did once they were in the land, as the book of Judges shows. It is the pattern that the prophets show which led Israel directly into what the prophets termed *adultery*, but was actually *idolatry*.

I want us to notice a scripture in the book of Acts 16:17. This took place when Paul crossed into Europe for the very first time. He was in Philippi. In verse 14 it tells that a woman by the name of Lydia was converted there.

**Acts 16:16-17** And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

It is "***the way***" that I want us to think about here. The definite article appears here. This is one of many places where this appears. I think I heard Garner Ted say one time that nine times in the book of Acts alone the definite article appears before the word "way." That definite article may be "the," "this," or "that," but whichever one of those articles is used, it is indicating a specific manner, approach, or direction the followers of Jesus are to live life. It is indicating that there is ***one way***—a specific way.

If I can fit this into this sermon, "this way" is one specific body of doctrine that is called "the faith of Jesus Christ." This is what we are to believe in. We do not possess it in its fullness, but it is what we are to seek out and to make a part of our life. Now Jesus touched on this. So important is it that He touched on this in the last monologue that He gave to His apostles on the night before He was crucified.

**John 14:3-5** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there you may be also. And whither I go you know, and ***the way*** you know. Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whither you go; and how can we know ***the way***?

What is the subject here of this discourse right at this point? It is "***the way***" that these men are going to have to follow after Jesus Christ goes back to the Father.

**John 14:6** Jesus said unto him, I am *the way*, *the truth*, and *the life*: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.

"**That way**" is that important. "**That way**" is the way Jesus Christ lived, and "**that way**" is what He lived before the apostles and taught to them, and "**that way**" was the way they taught to the church and that they wrote in the epistles. In practical terms, we have to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, and that is "**the way**" and that will ensure that we will be following the body of beliefs that Jesus taught and Jesus Himself lived. If we are going to be in the Kingdom of God, it will be because we are following His teaching and the manner in which He conducted Himself while He was with them.

Peter said essentially the same thing, and I want to look at one of the things he said in I Peter 2:21.

**I Peter 2:21** For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps.

Although the specific context here involves suffering, the general principle given by Peter reflects the same concept that we have been talking about here. For a Christian doing right, doing the works we were created in Christ Jesus to do, involves believing and practicing the teaching and the way of Jesus Christ.

After making that statement, Peter finished this epistle. In his second epistle, he wrote one of the strongest chapters written by an apostle. In II Peter 2, he warns about the very thing that we just began this sermon with—Jude 3.

**II Peter 2:1-2** But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways. [Singular—there is *one way*, but there are many ways that deviate.]: by reason of whom **the way** [a singular specific way] of truth shall be evil spoken of.

In verse 15 Peter is still talking about these people who are doing this preaching, and says:

**II Peter 2:15** Which have forsaken **the right way**, and are gone astray, following the way [a specific wrong way] of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.



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**II Peter 2:21** For it had been better for them not to have known **the way** of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Brethren, there might be many ways to get from here to, let us say, New York City, but the Bible indicates only **one way** to the Kingdom of God, and that way does not include rejecting clear biblical teaching.

I want you to look in the book of Revelation 3 in His letter to the Philadelphia Church. If we understand this properly, this is an end-time prophecy. Certainly it applied to those people in the days in which it was written, but the primary purpose of the book of Revelation is not the first century, it is the century in which we now live. We feel very strongly from the evidences that are available to us out in the world that we are close to the coming of Jesus Christ. This message to the church in Philadelphia is to a church, a group of Christians who live in the end-time. Notice the instructions.

**Revelation 3:11** Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you **have**, that no man take your crown.

That is pretty clear. That is a **major** responsibility of those of us who live at the end. We are not to allow the things that were delivered to us, like Jude said, to slip away, but rather Jude shows very clearly it is going to be a fight to hang onto it. If we just make a timid response to the commands of God to seek Him out and to hang in there, we are very likely to be overcome by the complacent, lukewarm, Laodicean attitude that is out there in the world. I am not talking about the church. I am talking about that drive, that attitude, that force out there which can carry us along with it if we do not fight against it, and do something against fighting it.

The evidence is very clear in these polls and surveys—the world of religion that we are dealing with is complacent and indifferent. It is out there, forcing against the truth of God which you have. We can easily fall victim to it if we allow ourselves, without fighting against the tide of public opinion that is out there. Please remember Jude's word. He says it is a fight to hang on. John says, "Hold fast what you have."

We are living in a nation that is largely complacent about godly values, and it is very easy to get drawn into it. Now what makes this rejection pattern of such critical importance is that at this time of history there is something that is brewing on the horizon, as news reports are showing ever more frequently.

In my last sermon I gave you two patterns of gradually intensifying punishment and correction—one from Leviticus 26, and one from Amos 4. They were somewhat different in their approach, but they were essentially the same. And now, brethren, persecutions against Christianity are increasing and intensifying.

Author Don McAlvany, on page 268 of his book titled "Storm Warming: The Coming Persecution of Christians and Traditionalists in America," states that there are five gradually intensifying steps leading to the persecution of *any* group. It does not have to be Christianity. It can be anybody, but you are going to be able to see very clearly that these five steps are taking place, especially in the United States of America, in Great Britain, and in Canada. It is very clear.

The first of these five steps became publicly noticeable to historians, and other such kinds of people who search into these things, as far back as the 1920s and 1930s in the United States, when unfavorable fault-finding characterizations of Christians began to appear frequently. The key word here is "**frequently**," because Christians have always been characterized in a less than positive way in novels and so forth, but in the 1920s and 1930s it began to appear pretty frequently in novels, movies, and stage presentations.

*The first of these steps is an identifying and stereotyping of the group.*

The *Dictionary of Modern Sociology* defines stereotyping as: "a pre-conceived standardized group-shared idea about the alleged essential nature of those making up a whole category of persons without regard to individual difference among those making up the category." In this case Christians are the whole category.

Have you personally ever noticed how Christians are stereotyped by the entertainment industry or movies? Christians are almost invariably portrayed as stodgy, weak, judgmental, self-righteous killjoys who are rigid and insufferably bigoted.

What stereotyping accomplishes is that it makes the group an easy target. Before you can shoot something down you have to be able to see your target, and so the way to see a target in a culture is to *stereotype* them. This will become clearer as we go along. If you happened to be a Jew in Nazi Germany, you were very easily spotted because you had been stereotyped.

*The second step is marginalizing the group.*

Marginalizing pushes the group out of the mainstream to the margins of society. This practice makes it very difficult for the group being marginalized to effectively make an impact on the culture because it severely diminishes their influence. The Nazis did this to the Jews.

The first step the Nazis took in marginalizing the Jews was to deny the Jews membership in the Nazi party. The next step was excluding them from government positions and civil servant responsibilities. Eventually they denied them positions in businesses like banks, and then a bit later, those already having those kind of jobs were summarily fired simply because they were Jews. It did not matter what the quality of their work was, they were simply fired.

In the United States, marginalization of Christians began in academia, in the universities, so that today Christians are virtually totally marginalized so as to have almost no influence among the faculty, and therefore biblical positions are almost never taught; rather they are scoffed at and ridiculed.

At the same time, on another front, the political left is systematically pushing Christians to the margins and out of the mainstream of American culture. It is becoming increasingly difficult for a committed Christian to get an important job—sometimes *any* job—in the entertainment industry, media, academia, and in law firms.

Guess what the main target is right now. It is elementary and high school faculties. Pushing this is the National Education Association. There is a concerted effort by the ACLU and organizations like *People for the American Way*—what a misnomer that is!—and other foundations to exclude Christians from wielding influence in all of public life; thus the attack on things like school prayer, the Ten Commandments, Bibles, nativity scenes, and so forth. If any politician or civil servant, like the judge in Alabama, does something in alignment with the Bible, he is attacked for violating separation of church and state.

*The third step is vilification.*

To vilify is to make vicious and defamatory statements about someone. In this stage the entire group is portrayed as evil, wicked, villainous, antisocial, dangerous miscreants who represent a real danger to the entire society. So in Nazi Germany the Jews, who never really amounted to very many and who were just a tiny minority of the population of Germany, were vilified. Goebbels and his staff beat the drum like the Jews were the

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greatest ogres that had ever walked on the face of the earth. That theme became repeated so often that it became first-hand knowledge for the man on the street.

Hitler was not the first by far to vilify a certain segment of society. In ancient Rome Nero used this ploy to make scapegoats of the Christians as being those who set Rome to the torch, almost burning it to the ground. Well, the Nazi propaganda machine portrayed the Jews as vermin, greedy, thirsty, unscrupulous, subhuman, raping the country for illegal profit.

It was just a few months ago that a New York State prosecutor referred to two Christians who were *on trial* for praying down on their knees in front of an abortion clinic. He described them as *rabid* Christians. That is a pretty strong word, because according to my thesaurus a rabid one is one who is fierce, fanatical, furious, insane, raging, rampant, virulent, and violent. Prayer is violent!

The Chicago Tribune ran a MacNelly political cartoon. I know that every adult in this room has seen a MacNelly political cartoon, because MacNelly is one of the most famous political cartoonist whose work is syndicated all across the United States. This political cartoon by MacNelly featured seven black vultures sitting on a tree limb, each with a name of a religion, including Christian, inscribed on it, and the vultures were saying in unity, "Let us prey!"

Stages 1, 2, and 3 are firmly entrenched in American culture, and the ever-intensifying stereotyping, marginalization, and vilification have set the stage for step 4, which is already underway.

*Step 4 is Criminalization.*

To criminalize is to impose a criminal penalty on, or to outlaw something formerly legal—perhaps indeed something a Christian would look at it as being righteous.

The definition of hate crimes—terrorism, sexual harassment, and child abuse—are now being expanded to include many *normal* Christian traditions and beliefs. I just mentioned the arresting and putting on trial of the people praying in front of an abortion clinic. They had been arrested. That lets the public perceive these people as criminals. They could have just let them go, because all they were doing was praying. They were not breaking windows. They were not stopping anybody from going into the clinic. They were not harassing anybody. They were simply down on their knees praying.

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If they had taken them to the police station and then let them go, maybe with a reprimand, but they were on trial as criminals. I do not know what specific statute they were charged with breaking, but it is very difficult for me to say that this is really a criminal act. I think that you can begin to see that the definition on what is a criminal act, what is hate crime, what is terrorism, is being expanded out to include things that you and I would do gladly before God and think that we would be doing a righteous thing. We would.

Have you been reading about the Homeland Security Act and the Patriot Act, and how your liberties, not only as a Christian, but even as a United States citizen, can be wiped away in just a moment in time? General Franks—I do not know what he is right now, whether he is retired, or whatever—has publicly made the statement that he does not believe the Constitution of the United States will last beyond the next terrorist attack on the United States. The Homeland Security Act will be put into place, and our government will become a dictatorship. Maybe that will not be directed specifically at you and me, but we are going to get caught in it. Of that there is no doubt, and we are going to get caught in it perhaps more than anybody else for doing *righteous* things in the eyes of God.

It is also now becoming illegal in many areas for parents to spank their children, or to teach them that homosexuality is wrong. We will get more on this a little bit later. Legal restrictions are being placed, mostly by bureaucrats and activist judges, on public prayer such as at high school football games and graduation.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission attempted not long ago to ban all religious free speech in the workplace. Their first attempt failed. Much of this would not have touched on us, but it **would** have criminalized the wearing of crosses and stars of David in the workplace. No crucifixes would be allowed. No religious plaques attached to the workstation wall would be allowed. No office Christmas parties or decorations would be permitted.

I say this to you so that you can understand the direction that things are going in. They are not here yet, but the criminalization of things is right on the horizon, and some small steps have already been taken. I ask you to consider this: Is the Sabbath far behind?

I have here an article written by David Limbaugh, the brother of Rush. This article warns of complacency of the American culture in light of what is already taking place. This was posted on the WorldNetDaily web site, March 11, 2004. He said:

Undeniably, a culture war is still raging in this country, but it's not much of a

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war because the good guys are barely fighting back. Is there anything that can shock the so-called majority out of its complacency?

He is concerned because Americans are taking this flat on their backs, sitting apparently comfortable with it, because they are reckoning that their own security is more important than liberty. Which is more important to you? Your own personal security, or the liberty to worship God? Limbaugh goes on to say:

But apart from the issue of whether a majority of Americans truly are Christians, it is absurd to believe that numbers alone control. Other factors, such as the organization, motivation, determination and militancy of the minority are highly important in the mix. Also relevant are the naiveté and complacency of the "majority" [meaning the Christians].

Now just in case you think he is just blowing hot air, he has a listing of things that have happened just in the past couple of months, most of them right here in California.

The audacity of the Massachusetts high court rewriting its constitution to redefine marriage and its cavalier treatment of the legislative branch.

This is the high court, not the legislature. They have completely circumvented the processes set up in the Massachusetts Constitution for changing law. I will give the legislature in Massachusetts at least a star of some kind, because they fought back and reprimanded the supreme court and said, "We will take care of this!"

The lawlessness of public officials legitimizing homosexual marriage.

Are you aware that what the mayor up in San Francisco did was illegal? It makes you wonder how long this had to go on before the attorney general did anything. It was several weeks.

The brazenness, and frankly, depravity of the recent "National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers."

A national day of appreciation for those who murder babies.

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The Supreme Court's disallowance of theology scholarships.

This happened up in Washington where the young man was turned down because he wanted to study theology. He was qualified in every way. They gave him the scholarship, and then took it back when they found out he wanted to go to a seminary.

The California Supreme Court's decision that the employee healthcare plans of Catholic charities must provide access to contraception.

We will get more on this just a little bit later.

The lawsuit seeking to expel the Boy Scouts from public parklands in San Diego because of their adherence to traditional values.

They can be tolerant of anything unless it is Christian, and then they are intolerant of it.

President Bush and others resisting a fundamental revision of the thousands-year-old institution of marriage are accused of political opportunism, initiating a culture conflict, and hatefulness.

Do you see what they have done? These activists have turned the tables, and instead of George Bush protecting the culture, he is the one who is accused of stirring things up!

Jane Fonda is being honored as one of the "100 Women of the Century."

Sen. Kerry actually boasted that America-unfriendly foreign leaders prefer him as president.

This is weird! He is basically saying, "My enemies love me!" If that is true, they love him because they know they are going to get what they want from America.

Finally, David Limbaugh says:

I'm just scratching the surface, but based on these examples alone, how can there be such irresponsible lethargy among the "majority" in this country? It's

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time they wake up.

*The fifth step is the onset of intense persecution.*

This will involve greatly stepped up direct governmental actions, including the denial of civil and constitutional rights, false accusations, detentions, intimidations, arrests, imprisonments, and in some cases torture and death.

There is no clearer pattern of gradually intensifying persecution than in Germany leading up and into World War II. But the persecution of those claiming to be Christian is already underway in every Islamic country, in China, and especially in Sudan, which is an Islamic country. In Sudan alone 2 million people professing to be Christians have already been killed.

I think that we can understand that the real generator of the persecution is Satan, but in the United States the human leadership is found in the political left and the globalist organization attempting to pull the United States of America into the New World Order. Mikhail Gorbachev, (whom we have magnanimously given a home up in San Francisco in the Presidio and have put him over the destruction of our military bases) called The New World Order "*The New Civilization.*" God calls it "***the Beast.***"

Brethren, I have no idea how long it is going to take for this to develop, but it is developing. The evidence is out there. It is happening at an ever-increasing speed. We can see it happening if you have your eyes open here in the United States, and if there ever was a time to begin to turn to God in the right way, it is ***NOW!***

Jesus, through Luke, said that we are to watch and pray always. I want to admonish you that this word "watch" is misunderstood I think by very many in the church who came out of the Worldwide Church of God. Yes indeed, it does mean watch, at least to some small degree, world news, but that is not the focus of the word. The word means, "**be alert to yourself, and pray always!**"

Jesus is saying, "**Watch where you stand in the midst of all of this.**" It is simply another way of saying (like John later did in the book of Revelation), "**Hold fast!**" You cannot hold fast to what you have unless you are alert to where you stand. We have to be on guard, and fighting and contending for the faith that was once delivered, because this period of time that we are living in is putting a pressure on us for us to conform to *it*.

The Bible shows very clearly that the dominant attitude in these Israelitish nations at this



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time is not what we see in Islam. It is what we see in the United States of America. It is complacency in our wealth, feeling that our wealth and our military strength and our place and position in the world is going to somehow keep us secure. It will not! It is the relationship with God that is going to keep us secure. In order to be in right with God, we have got to be watching where we stand in the midst of all of this. Certainly watching world news is a help, but the focus of Jesus' attention was that we watch ourselves and not allow ourselves to drift away with the tide of public attitude and opinion.

**Psalm 11:3** If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Brethren, the foundations of the United States of America are shaking. The foundations of this nation are in our semi-Christian constitution, and law, and morality that is based upon biblical law and principle because of the kind of Christianity that the founders had, which was certainly good in its place. It is not *real* Christianity, but it is *way* better than what we see being practiced today.

Their belief in God and in God's word was much stronger even if it was not completely the will of God. But God, through those men, made a place, made a nation where righteousness **could** flourish. Well, this is being taken away at a record pace, and even to the point now where it is being criminalized. The foundations are shaking. What can the righteous do? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" It is not destroyed yet, but it is headed in that direction.

Verse 4 of Psalm 11 becomes an admonishment, a reminder to you and me.

**Psalm 11:4-5** The LOORD is in his holy temple: [God is still on His throne. He is still alive. He knows what is going on.] the LOORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men. The LOORD tries [tests, proves] the righteous: but the wicked and him that loves violence his soul hates.

**II Timothy 3:12** Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

This is a positive statement ensuring that those who live the right way, who follow the way of Jesus Christ, *are going to face persecution*. Tribulation and persecution are no longer a matter of *if*, but when.

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These things might occur for a number of reasons, but two of the best established, at least in the biblical history, are (1) the punishment of the wicked and (2) to test His children for the purpose of purifying them through repentance and growth.

What we need to understand is that God can do **both** with the same events, depending on the way that He deals with either one, and in the way in which His children respond to what is going on in the culture around them. God is watching our response.

Paul wrote this a little bit earlier to Timothy:

**II Timothy 2:11-13** It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we believe not, [Remember, these three sermons have been about people's beliefs. Is it really important what we believe?] yet he abides faithful: he cannot deny himself.

God is watching our response, and so with one and the same event He can punish the wicked, and He can test the saints. We must understand that we will not escape some of the tribulation and persecution, because God *is* going to clean up His own backyard, as it were. He must know who is loyal, who really believes in what He has written.

Do you remember what God said regarding Abraham in Genesis 22 when that thing was over? He said, "*Now I **know** that you fear Me!*" Maybe I should change the emphasis there to, "*Now I know that you fear **Me!***"—because there are a lot of things, a lot of people, a lot of circumstance that we can fear, but the test comes in who it is and what it is that we fear. *We* especially. "*Now I know that you fear **Me.***" That meant a lot to God, and in one sense it meant **everything** to Abraham, because that was God's assurance that he was accepted. That was quite a test though. If that had happened in the world, it would have been persecution, but because God directly did it, it was perhaps the ultimate test. In many cases it is harder to give up your loved one's life than it is your own.

I have to stop because I talked too long I guess, but we will stop right here. The series is not over yet, and God-willing, we will go on with this subject right on through the Days of Unleavened Bread because it is important to the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The children of Israel did not endure the test and trials that came on them during their pilgrimage, and we are heading into a time of very great and strong testing. I know that God will moderate it for everyone of us according to what He determines we are able to

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endure. We do get the promise that He will never test us above what we are able, but I can guarantee you this, that the test we do receive is going to test us to the limit of our faith, and so it is going to be equally hard for everybody. God does not play favorites.

It is coming, and so we have to watch as Jesus commanded, and pray always that we might be accounted worthy to escape at least the very worst of what is right on the horizon right now.