

Pervasive Persecution

By Lynn Warner

After studying the definition of “persecution” over the years, I realized it has been occurring here in America all my life. Persecution is to pursue in a manner to injure, vex, or afflict; to harass or destroy, to perplex or twist (my paraphrase of Noah Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English language definition of persecution).

My mind has always glossed over the Bible’s references to sorcery and witchcraft, because I get a picture of the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” or a Halloween costume witch in my mind. Properly defined, however, sorcery and witchcraft are interpretations of reality that deny, suppress, minimize, and exclude God. The effect this has on Believers is persecution. How these techniques have been employed systematically in my lifetime would be a study in itself. In my lifetime, I have seen a steady progression through Romans chapter one – especially Romans 1:28: “*And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God and longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper.*” Verse 29 lists how those who do not acknowledge God are filled with all unrighteousness.

When I look back at my life, I see how I have acknowledged God at times in my conduct to friends, family, and strangers. Other times, however, I have been silenced by the persecution of sorcery and witchcraft. I have learned that sorcery, witchcraft, and persecution can be much more subtle than I ever imagined. People I knew never came outright and said, “I hate you because you are talking about Jesus; if you would stop talking about Jesus, we can be ‘friends.’” Instead, they perverted our relationship through criticism and accusation – condemning me through sarcasm and contempt, a defensive, self-righteous attitude, and finally silent withdrawal and rejection - all the while blaming me for what was happening.

I have found that identifying and confronting persecution can be very difficult and confusing, but 2 Timothy 3 has helped me understand that persecution and the deception of false doctrine (sorcery and witchcraft) go hand-in-hand: “*But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of Godliness (or, religion – NASB sidebar) although they have denied its power*” (2 Timothy 3:1-2;4-5). Paul then describes certain men who oppose truth, men of depraved minds who captivate people who are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:17). But Paul commends Timothy for following his teachings and conduct, and sharing in his persecution and suffering, stating, “*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (2 Timothy 3:12-13).

So, in summary, the deceptions of sorcery and witchcraft go hand-in-hand with persecution. I have seen deception increase exponentially over my lifetime. Particularly in the last ten years, when it seems God has turned our nation over to the consequences of Romans chapter one. Many techniques are used to silence Believers. Not all of them are as visible and open as we have a tendency to think persecution should be. Oftentimes, persecution’s goal of suppressing and denying God’s sovereignty, providence, and salvation in our lives actually comes through personal, seemingly unrelated acts of criticism, condemnation, self-righteousness, rejection, and withdrawal if we continue to practice Godly lives in Christ Jesus and stand for the Truth. However, like Timothy, we can be encouraged by Scripture to continue in the things we have learned and are assured of, because “*all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching,*

for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).