

The reason behind the reason; conformity. 1 of 3 - 20201024

Hi all,

I made the observation in my book *Return of the First Church* that the early church was a counter-culture movement whereas the modern auditorium church is now merely a sub-culture of the world around it.

A sub-culture is a small self-insulated group within a larger society, and has its own beliefs, terminology, world view, and often its own manner of dress. Back in high school days sub-cultures at your school may have included the athletes and cheerleaders in one culture, the gangs in another, the skaters, the nerds, and so on each in their respective cultures. Each sub-culture in that school was unique, yet existed in the larger society of high school, all moving in the same direction - towards graduation. Sub-cultures generally move in the same direction as society as a whole.

The sub-culture mentality is why churches have fallen into the error of thinking if they had the quality of the world in their facilities, if their 'worship' resembled the world's rock concert, if they had professional elements of a concert, they would attract new people to their auditorium church. They look like the world, sound like it, talk like it, in an effort to be relevant. They are moving in the same direction as the world. They are a sub-culture.

A counter-culture is a way of life with values that are opposed to the prevailing society. A counter-culture is moving in the opposite direction of local culture and the world.

Most of what Jesus said was counter-culture. Consider Matthew 5:43-48: "You have heard it said to love your neighbors but hate your enemies. But I say to you to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you so that you may be like your Father in heaven."

That is counter-culture. He commands a way of life and values directly opposed to the prevailing society and culture around Him. That was powerful. Life-changing. Opposite of all that culture and society believed. Love your enemies. Pray for them. Do good to them. That is counter-culture.

That is where the power of the body of Christ lies, within its place as a counter-culture.

Blame God for this one; The Counter-culture

God is the one who started the early church at Pentecost, and He birthed it to be counter-culture because it (we) adhere to the teachings of Jesus. God had moved out of the temple and into human beings and that was exactly opposite of the whole religious culture of the day. The synagogue system was run by aristocratic elites who said God lived in the building, while the church was run by uneducated fishermen who said God lives in people.

The Jewish elites were centralized to the temple system, which directed all money, power, and attention to themselves. The church was decentralized as God moved out of the temple and into human beings, giving them the freedom to meet together with other living temples as they chose, to give to one another, to support one another and their leaders at will. All this and more was exactly opposite of the existing temple system which dictated what the people heard, how they gave, how they were to include the temple in their lives, and how to interact with one another - Having Christ in people as living temples was and remains a counter-culture.

The reason behind the reason persecution happens

If we can lay aside for a moment what we all understand as the spiritual reason for persecution - we all know the devil hates God and God's people so he stirs people to persecute us - to look at it from cultural perspective, we will see something.

What made the rulers of Babylon persecute Daniel?

What made the rulers of Babylon persecute the 3 Hebrew men to the point they put them in the furnace?

What made the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem persecute the early church?

What made the Roman Caesars persecute the Christians?

What made Nazi Germany persecute the Jews and Christians? (Not only did about 6 million Jews die in the camps, but another roughly 5 million Christians and political prisoners died there as well.)

What made the USSR persecute Jews and Christians?

Why are Christians being persecuted today in nations dominated by religions other than Christianity?

The answer is simple: They were different.

The deeper answer beyond that: Not only were they different, but they refused to be the same.

The still deeper answer beyond that: They insisted on their own identity rather than how the State identified them. (Using an emotional crutch, traitors, rebels, mentally ill, dangerous to society, etc)

In each example they were hated because they were counter-culture. A counter-culture refuses to conform to the expectations of society. A counter-culture moves in the opposite direction as the common culture of the day.

In nations considered culturally Christian, the Father and our Lord are making it so the body of Christ is a counter-culture once again. And we'll pick it up there next week. For those who have ears to hear, you'll recognize this is prophetic....until next week,
Blessings,

John Fenn

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The reason behind the reason; Refusing to be the same. 2 of 3 - 20201031

Hi all,

Last week I mentioned the reason the church has been persecuted through the ages is because they were different from the culture and society around them. But not just that we are different; we refuse to be the same.

This is what is going on now in the body of Christ in nations largely considered to have Christian roots: Christians are choosing to either quietly integrate and adopt the values of the culture around them, or they are choosing to be different by standing firm on their beliefs, morals, and convictions.

The pattern of persecution - it starts with culture turning against

We find what first happens is a change of culture that turns people against one another. Consider Daniel was 'turned in' to the king by his peers and coworkers. People even start reporting on their neighbors. In Acts 5:12-13 it says many healings and miracles happened among the believers, who met in home-based churches.

But outside of those home meetings and that circle of people on the 'same spiritual page', in society as a whole it says the people who weren't believers were afraid of them and no one dared join themselves to them. Why were they afraid of them? Persecution? In part. But they were also different from the culture and they refused to conform. Yet in their difference from society God was manifesting Himself in healings and miracles. So a tug of war began in the hearts of the people: The average citizen might say, 'Here is a group hated by the authorities which makes me afraid, yet God is in their midst which is what I want most of all.'

In the very next verse it says many became believers and were added to the faith.

That apparent contradiction reveals a split in society at that time - there was fear among the unbelievers and yet disciples were being made. They were different from the culture of the day, everyone knew what they stood for, and you were either for them or against them.

Selected leaders to be made examples of

Soon the rulers in Israel began a policy of orchestrated arrests. Peter and John were brought before the leaders in Acts 4. Steven's arrest and execution in Acts 7 escalated the persecution. Saul of Tarsus became chief prosecutor after Steven's death, and in Acts 9 Saul, the future apostle Paul, meets Jesus outside Damascus. This stopped the Jewish leaders in Israel's efforts to carry the persecution of the church beyond the borders of Israel.

By Acts 12 we are told (in Jerusalem) Herod had killed the apostle John's brother, James, by the sword and arrested Peter with the same intent.

Notice the seed of State persecution began when the leaders were successful in making citizens afraid of Christians. The fear of the Jews in Jerusalem was that these Christians would try to force their beliefs (religion) on them, threatening the Jewish religion and laws and the culture of Israel. But at this point the federal government of Rome is not yet fully involved.

Character assassination

In Mark 14:55-58 we find the leaders prosecuting Jesus at trial with false witnesses, some of whom took His words out of context and twisted His words from original intent to fit their agenda.

In our day we see the same character assassination, words twisted, words out of context for anyone who does not conform to the prevailing anti-conservative anti-Jewish/Christian culture. Here and there are cases against selected people who stand in the way of the larger agenda. But a time is coming as it did for the church and Rome, where the whole of the culture will turn against and even blame Christians, Jews, and conservatives for whatever is wrong in a nation.

They try to make persecution a federal case

It is about 52AD in Acts 18:12-18, roughly 20 years after Pentecost. In Corinth, Greece we see persecutors of the faith taking their case outside the region of Israel in an effort to get the federal government of Rome involved against Christians.

In Corinth was a Roman Senator and Judge, Gallio. He is well known historically outside of the Biblical text for several reasons, among them that he was the brother of the famous Roman writer, Seneca. Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus was his full name, and when the Jews brought suit against Paul in federal court, they claimed Paul caused people to disobey the Jewish law and therefore they felt, Roman law.

Gallio 'cared for none of these things' and dismissed the case. He sent it back to the Jewish religion and their courts, not involving the federal government of Rome. His dismissal sent a clear message legally speaking, that unless these Christians clearly violated federal law Rome would not entertain such a lawsuit.

For Christians, Gallio had such influence being a Roman Senator and Judge, that the church overall had relative peace on a federal level for about 10 years, until Nero began his persecutions in the year 64. Though Paul was continually persecuted by unbelieving Jews during this time, the bulk of his letters which form our New Testament were written in this decade. (Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, I & II Thessalonians, Philemon, possibly Hebrews)

Soon however it wouldn't be the unbelieving Jews that would scheme to show Rome that Christians violated Roman federal law; Christians would do that for them, for Roman laws were about to change.

And that is where we'll pick it up next week. Hopefully you see a pattern, for what I'm sharing of our past is now in our present, and soon to be in our future. Until next week, blessings,
John Fenn

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The reason behind the reason, prophetic for the body, 3 of 3 - 20201107

Hi all,

I closed last week talking about how Gallio the Roman Senator and Judge, had refused to make being a Christian a federal offense, but the laws were soon to change.

Within a few years the Caesar's changed the law, making it required federal law to worship the Caesar and proclaim loyalty to Rome. Christians died by the thousands over the next 2 1/2 centuries because they refused to worship Caesar and proclaim their loyalty to the Empire. They were executed as traitors.

Worship of the State or the leader

Historically, once the process of judging one's loyalty as a citizen by a person's religion starts in a nation and culture, it progresses over a relatively short time. Daniel was initially treated well, fed the best food, the best education. But over a short time the enemies in society turned his faith in God into being unpatriotic to the King. Daniel's open worship of the Lord was twisted as a statement of disloyalty to the king and laws of the land.

In New Testament times, what started in Jerusalem as a dispute among Jews about a sect who believed Jesus is the Messiah, within a few decades turned into the accusation Christians were unpatriotic towards Rome. Their values were different, their allegiance was to Jesus rather than the government; they were counter culture.

In Nazi Germany laws were made in 1920 against Jews, followed by others in 1933 and 1935. Dachau, the first Nazi death camp, opened in 1933 with rapid expansion within 10 years to over 1,000 camps through 1944. Besides Jews and Christians, political conservatives were accused of being unpatriotic to Hitler. Look at China today sending Christian Uyghurs and ethnic Han Chinese to 'reeducation' camps, which are well publicized yet nations still do business with China.

What to watch for is this:

Faith in Jesus will be looked upon as weird, unpatriotic, and worse; the reason a nation has trouble. First leaders, and then society and common culture will change because they will want to quiet or eliminate in some way, the influence of those with faith. As with Daniel, Jesus, 1st century Christians, Jews and Christians and conservatives in Nazi Germany; we will be blamed for the ills of society. We will be viewed as prevention a nation from progressing.

What starts small, even on a local level, becomes federal within a few years. Fear that 'religious' people will force their values on a nation. Hatred for the principles that build nations and families becomes the norm. The State seeks to control everything. Media becomes a tool of the government. Character assassination and lawsuits directed towards selected situations, individuals, leaders, and anyone who differs with the State policy happens.

Neighbors spy on neighbors, laws are enacted to facilitate such things. Daniel was called a traitor after being spied on by coworkers. Jesus was betrayed by a disciple, and Peter, Paul and thousands of Christians in Rome were labeled enemies of Rome. The State tries to control everyone, and the media and culture help, seeking conformity and punishing those who are different.

No matter the nation, the mob mentality wants everyone to conform and those who don't are labeled, separated, hated. In The Revelation, if you want to buy or sell, you must first state your allegiance to the system/man and then you receive a mark that allows you to buy and sell. Conformity. Uniformity. Allegiance.

We see these things developing around the world today in whole nations all at the same time, and some Christians just as they did in Paul's time, will conform to the values of the ruling elite. But others will not. Thus we will see some churches going the way of the world in the name of being relevant, and some Christians who refuse to conform. We're not only different, we refuse to be the same.

What Jesus is doing

So that is the direction the world is going, but what is Jesus doing? He is moving in the opposite direction. He started in the home with Adam & Eve and has never left. His values have never changed: I was hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, in prison, and you fed, watered, clothed, befriended and visited me. He is meek, lowly, approachable, come and be taught by Him. Jesus is about the people in the pews, not about the laser light show at the 'worship' or the coffee shop in the foyer. His idea of being relevant means taking care of people where they live.

He is all about everyday things like one's basic provision, connectedness, relationships, friendships. When the early church was born at Pentecost Acts 242 says their meetings included these 4 elements: Teaching, fellowship, food, prayer. Fellowship is holy, not an afterthought to a meeting as in, 'After our service we will have fellowship in the kitchen area.' They met in homes and knowing one

another was important - and that is where God moved to heal, answer prayer, connect people in caring godly relationships.

Without fanfare Jesus is moving in the midst of relationships among believers. We are seeing more healings, more miracles, more answered prayer in our network than ever before. It doesn't matter whether it happens in a web meeting or in someone's home, around the world the Lord is on the move. Being meek and lowly in heart, He doesn't seek media attention - He just goes about His business as He always has.

In the visitation of December 2019 and in a recent visitation, the Lord expanded His comments to me about how house churches would be known as the place to go for answered prayer, provision, and miracles in one's life. .

Christianity must be spiritual and have the Spirit of God moving in our midst

If we don't regularly have the Holy Spirit in us and through us towards others we end up having a form of godliness yet denying the power. It's not their fault: The auditorium church structure of service doesn't allow for everyone to move in the Spirit or receive prayer in small groups. As a result, we have Christians who know all about Jesus, but have never seen the Holy Spirit move in their midst.

Worse yet, we have pastors who know how to lead a service but not how to move in the gifts of the Spirit. We have worship leaders who know how to lead a service, but not how to set the stage for the Holy Spirit to move in the midst. Many Christians know about Him, but don't know Him. They don't know the Father.

We all need to know that Christ really does live in us and speaks to us, and guides us, and shows us things to come. Without Him in our midst we have a form of godliness but don't know the power thereof.

Just like in the early church in Acts 2-4, just like in Rome during times of persecution, just like in nations in the last 2,000 years that have persecuted Christians, there is coming a time when many of those Christians who are in close relationships with others in home based meetings will have their needs met while many on the outside will be in need. Even in the US, we may have a reprieve, but that is all it is. Remember what the Lord told me 2/4/2001: "As it was in the beginning so it must be now; I'm moving in relationships."

Sobering to think about - new subject next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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