

July 12, 2012

Dear Members, Co-Workers and Friends,

How close are we to the day of Christ's return? Of course, we do not know for sure (Matthew 24:44; 25:13), and we should never attempt to set dates—not even speculative dates—but we are encouraged to observe the signs of the time (Matthew 16:2-3) to determine whether or not the day is near (Matthew 24:32-34). Sadly, before Christ can come back, terrible events will have to occur first, described in the Bible as the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

Even though some in God's Church will be protected at a place of safety here on earth (Revelation 12:13-16), others will have to experience unparalleled persecution and even martyrdom (Revelation 12:17; 6:9-11). But Paul said that all who want to live godly will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12)—even prior to the end of this present evil age. And increasing religious persecution of the faithful is one indication of impending frightful days of such magnitude "such as not have been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

We should be able to see that religious intolerance and rejection of godly standards are on an unparalleled rise in, especially, the Western World, including the USA, Canada, the UK and continental Europe. In Isaiah 5:20, God pronounces a curse on those "who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." In these last days, we see how this wrong standard of reversed values has terribly increased—under the influence of Satan the devil, of course, who is deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9). His wrath is great because he knows that his days of deception are numbered (Revelation 12:12). He transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), putting "darkness for light," and inspires his ministers to pretend to be ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15), calling "evil good, and good evil." Since this is so, we are not told today, including in our many "Christian" churches, what is good and holy and right in God's eyes (Ezekiel 22:26); rather, we are told that those things which are abhorred by God are good, and that righteous conduct which is upheld by God is evil.

Just look around and note what is going on in our sophisticated "civilized" and "enlightened" world. God condemns homosexual practices, adultery and fornication (i.e., pre-marital sex). Our societies tolerate or even welcome all of them. God condemns wars and abortions; but we have been led to believe that these are necessary—or sometimes even welcome—to deal with our personal and national situations. God condemns pagan worship and insists instead in keeping His weekly and annual Sabbaths—but Satan has deceived nominal Christianity to abolish God's Holy Days and replace them with holidays which are derived from pagans. Rather than remembering the weekly Sabbath to keep it holy, we are told to forget the Sabbath and keep Sunday holy instead. Rather than worshipping God on His annual Holy Days, we are asked to profane God's holy name by neglecting His days and observing instead, "in God's honor," pagan days such as Christmas and Easter. Yes, indeed, religious teachers encourage us to reject the commandments of God so that we can keep our human traditions (Mark 7:6-9).

God tells us that it is wrong to ever physically abuse a child, but that it is right on rare occasions to spank our little children, in a balanced and loving way (Proverbs 29:15). However, man, in his own God-defying wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:20) has determined that even light spanking is always wrong and must be rejected. And now, physical circumcision—even though not required today for Christians, but most certainly not prohibited in Scripture—has been declared by a German court as constituting physical abuse of young children and a crime, and to the shame of many Germans and others, this abominable decision has been embraced and applauded.

Worldly courts in our Western societies have begun to interpret or enforce laws against "hate crimes," by prohibiting sermons of ministers who are willing to teach the clear doctrines of the Holy Bible and threatening those ministers with fines and jail terms. Mind you, we are not talking about dictatorial countries such as China or Russia, or certain Muslim societies, but our so-called Christian nations in our Western world.

We can expect these kinds of persecutions to continue and increase in frequency and power, testing all of us as to whom we are willing to obey more—God or man (Acts 5:29)? In some

“Christian” countries, parents are being confronted with mandatory school attendance laws, prohibiting homeschooling and requiring them to violate their religious conviction regarding the sanctity of the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, and to send their children on these days to school or kindergarten. In other countries, there are no exceptions to compulsory military service. Will those being drafted have the spiritual strength to obey God and not do anything, which would violate the letter or the spirit of the law against killing?

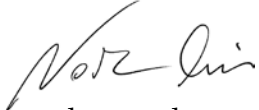
Some countries require of their citizens to vote in governmental elections or to serve on a jury. Will those called upon to do so have the spiritual strength to obey God and not participate in such conduct, which is clearly prohibited in Scripture? Many face difficulties on their jobs, as employers will try to persuade their employees, who are opposed to working on the Sabbath, to give in “just a little,” as this “important task” will “have to be done” on the Sabbath. It will take wisdom as to how to approach and handle such situations, but since giving in just a little will always lead to more compromise and violations of God’s laws, the bottom line will always have to be: Are we willing to obey God rather than man, even in “little things”—no matter what the consequences?

The fact is, we are not living in a godly world. No country is godly or righteous in God’s eyes. We all have rejected God and turned our backs on Him (Romans 3:9-18). We are all under Satan’s influence, and it is GOD who must call us out of this world, including our country’s politics and agendas. The Babylonian system permeates the entire world, and we are admonished to “Come out of her, my people” (Revelation 18:4), and not to touch anything which is unclean (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). In doing this, we will be persecuted by man and man’s governments, but Christ says that we are blessed when this happens (Matthew 5:10-12). By remaining a part of the systems, philosophies and politics of this evil world, upholding its standards instead of God’s values, we might retain our “friends” and avoid some persecution from man, but we won’t ever become a friend of God and Christ (James 4:4; John 15:14) and will have to experience the wrath of God in His due time (Romans 2:5-11).

As we observe the increasing darkness which permanently surrounds us, we must become bright and observable lights shining in this evil world (Philippians 2:15), and as God’s Church, we must continue, with ever increasing strength which God will give us, to proclaim the good news to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14). We realize that Satan, the prince of darkness, has blinded the minds of most and that the gospel is veiled to them, preventing that the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Still, we must continue to do the Work of proclaiming the good news of the coming restoration of all things (Acts 3:21), when Christ returns to end Satan’s rule and establish the Kingdom of God on this earth.

As we progress in our godly endeavors, we will experience persecution from man under Satan’s rule, but it will all be worth it. In the end, God will crush Satan under our feet (Romans 16:20), and we will assist Christ in ruling this world righteously and godly, applying God’s uncompromising and unalterable standards, defining what is holy and unholy, right and wrong, clean and unclean, and good and evil (Ezekiel 44:23-24). Let’s make sure that we don’t become indifferent today towards our individual and collective responsibilities, because we will soon reap everlasting life, if we don’t lose heart (Galatians 6:8-9).

With brotherly love,



Norbert Link