

## *Pk's Perspectives ...Living A Quiet Life*

There are so many déjà vu like events in church history. The persecutions of the early church are well-known, but it is worth remembering that this was not because they were trying to impose Christianity by legislation or economic pressure, nor indeed because they maintained some quaint religious philosophy that differed from the majority. Rome was full of diverse superstitions and was only too happy to have more, providing they served the glory of the empire and sought the well-being of the nation.

Christianity was not ultimately concerned with Rome's well-being; nor indeed was it unconcerned. The early Christians had been instructed by the apostles to pray for their rulers at a time when these very rulers were dipping believers in wax up to their necks, in order to be living candles in Nero's garden. Jesus had taught them to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is His" (*Mt. 22*). Furthermore, God had counseled them to be obedient to their rulers (*Rm. 13*), warned against counterfeit miracles (*2 Thess. 2:9*), and instructed them, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (*1 Thess. 4:11-12*). They were not to respond to the persecutions either by running from the world or by trying to take over the world, but by trying to be the best citizens, employees, artisans, parents, and friends they could possibly be under the circumstances. An eternal perspective allowed successive generations to take a long view of history. Hardly separatistic or hostile to the world, even to the culture that had persecuted them, these believers threw themselves into proclaiming the Gospel and being 'salt' and 'light' in their own calling.

Even the moral strength of the early Christians was due to motives the average pagan could not understand: "The divergence lay in the Christian stress on the grace of God (rather than the individual's self-respect) and on the outgoing activity of charity toward one's fellow man." Instead of building homogenous churches, where the wealthy and the poor worshiped in their own churches, they all worshiped together. The poor needed the wealthy to help them get on their feet, and the wealthy needed the poor in order to demonstrate their gratitude to God through charity. This interdependence helped knit the diverse groups within the church together and became a marvel to the cynical but watching world. The church treasuries were even used to buy slaves and release them, and Christian slave-owners willingly released their slaves — as Paul had asked Onesimus — "for the sake of the Gospel." (*Adapted from Culture Wars by Michael S. Horton*)

John Stott writes, "How did Jesus expect His disciples to react under persecution? In Matthew 5:12 He said, "Rejoice and be glad!" We are not to retaliate like an unbeliever, nor sulk like a child, nor lick our wound in self-pity like a dog, nor just grin and bear it like a Stoic, still less pretend we enjoy it like a masochist. What then? We are to rejoice as a Christian should and even "leap for joy" (*Lk. 6:23*). Sustaining an eternal perspective is doable when you daily spend quiet time at Jesus' feet. Grace & peace, PK.