

Philippians 1:29 *For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*

The five stages of persecution. Each one happening in progression.

Stage 1 of persecution is stereotyping. Stereotyping is to oversimplify a group of people with ridicule, deriding language, and hatred. Stage 2 is accusations of crime and misconduct. Stage 3 is minimizing of the role and effect of a group in society. Stage 4 is the criminalization of Christianity. When activists set out to ruin those to whom they disagree with then it's persecution. Stage 5 is the active persecution of a targeted group.

These stages are happening in our society now. Now, there is a landslide of cultural animosity toward the church that cannot be abated by voting in the right politician. We need an awakened church that is willing to stand firm against the demonic woke-ness of our day. In 2015, we seemed to be in stage 3. Today we are seeing the beginning of stage 5.

This is a call to the church to be biblical and mature in the days ahead. **I Peter 5:8** *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

Nehemiah 2:17 *Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been burned by fire. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace."* Nehemiah had no idea what he would see. After seeing, he came back with a vision. Nehemiah is a picture of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and includes Himself in our lives. It is time to arise and build. That seed is planted in everyone who desires restoration. That seed is bound to produce a crop.

The temple had been built and they worshipped there. But outside, the walls and the gates were torn down. It's a picture of today too - people coming to worship and then going through the week with the walls of their lives torn down. What are the walls? broken relationships, shattered dreams, shameful habits, the roaring lion who seeks to destroy the people of God. Just like in Nehemiah, God has sent someone to come and rebuild, to inspire and to protect our lives. The Holy Spirit is alive and well and more than capable for the task. The topic of the Holy Spirit causes disruption in the church today. The enemy will do what he can to keep the power source, the healer, the comforter, the deliverer, and the teacher from us.

Nehemiah 2:18-19 *And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let's arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"*

These were enemies from areas surrounding Jerusalem. Like us today, we get excited about God's work and then the enemy comes against us. Bad news: When we begin to rebuild the walls of our lives, all of hell will come against us. Good news: When we begin to rebuild the walls of our lives, all of hell will come against us but **I John 4:4**... *greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.* There is never a time that God's army appears to be greater than the enemy.

Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Paul... God's plan calls for weakness in us so His strength can be greatest. **2 Corinthians 12:9** *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.* In weakness, look to God.

Four attacks that are common assaults of the enemy against every believer:

1. Control of our lives. Jesus will give us life - abundant and everlasting. Giving your life over to Jesus gives freedom unimaginable but also comes with attacks. The enemy desires control.
2. Against our character. The devil does not want us to rebuild the walls of our lives and will attack your character, integrity, courage, humility. The gift of the Holy Spirit is for all who follow His ways.
3. Against our worship. Worship is the very core of what we do in spirit and in truth. Nothing is more powerful than worshipping God face to face. But it means warfare.
4. Against daily encountering the Holy Spirit. Daily greetings and engagings with the Holy Spirit throughout the day defeats the devil.

Nehemiah 2:20 *So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem."* Nehemiah is a picture of the Holy Spirit. He hears of a troubled, defeated, and broken people and he requested to go. Jesus tells the disciples of the other One to come - that will be in all of believers, never to leave us, never forsake us, will be a comforter, a guide, a protector from the accuser, will give visions and dreams, will open the Word to each. He has come to rebuild, to empower, to go where we can never dream of. Nehemiah is not discouraged at the torn down walls, but is inspired. Jesus wants our messes. Since creation, God's work is about restoration of mankind back to our original intent. God understands. God comes to be with us and with the power to rebuild. The Holy Spirit identifies with us. He gives new hope and vision. What part of your life needs to be rebuilt? marriage, business, singleness? Go to the one who is an expert at restoration.

After the enemy mocks and threatens...**Nehemiah 2:20** *So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem."* What the devil means for evil, God will use for good. **Romans 8:28** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* Submit to the Holy Spirit of God and He will work more than we can imagine. He will rebuild according to the Word of God.

The hatred of the serpent's seed against the cause of Christ was planted in the garden and is not confined to any age or nation. In the upper room after His resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples the Holy Spirit of God. The church must declare that the God of Heaven will give us success. Trust God and His Word to give success in rebuilding.

Why does the topic of the Holy Spirit cause disruption today?

How can we stand against attacks of the enemy?

What needs restoring in your life?