

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

NOW WHAT ??

Tuesday's election - ecstasy of victory or agony of defeat? Either way, are you ready for even greater tribulation from the "continental divide" of worldviews in America? Half the country seems to hate whoever will be inaugurated next January 20th, along with what they stand for. Regardless how many Christians polled, the impact of your vote doesn't stop at the ballot box. You must follow through, keeping your Biblical values in the public square. Vote and be more vocal, not less. Even if vocality leads to volatility.

1- Christian persecution in America - The discrimination gamut runs from stereotyping, vilifying, marginalizing, criminalizing, to persecution involving indirect and direct means of harassment and harm. However it is expressed, American Christians sense more of it. You should expect more. A recent poll finds 63 percent of respondents think Christians face growing intolerance in America, up from 50 percent in 2013. And 38 percent strongly agree with that statement, up from 28 percent. However, 43 percent said Christians complain too much about how they are treated, up from 34 percent in 2013.

Surprised? One candidate said, "*under my administration, our Christian heritage will be cherished, protected, defended, like you have never seen before.*" His opponent called his supporters "*deplorables*" and "*irredeemable*" and "*not America.*" She said, "*deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs, and structural biases have to be changed.*" This attitude underlies hostility toward those who believe the Bible.

It's self-evident in the media and the mindset of activists and judges who undermine religious liberty - from restrooms to florists, bakers and photographers. It seems the only targets are Christian. As Ronald Reagan said, "*The First Amendment to our Constitution was not written to protect the people of this country from religious values, it was written to protect religious values from government tyranny.*"

2- Christian persecution worldwide - But most believers around the globe do not have constitutional protection. Scan reports at Persecution.com and OpenDoorsUSA.org and IcommitToPray.com and IDOP.org (organizers of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church). You may be shocked to learn what mainstream media won't report. At least 100 million Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments and neighbors - simply for being followers of Jesus Christ.

OpenDoors says, "From verbal harassment to hostile feelings, attitudes and actions, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith: beatings, physical torture, confinement, isolation, rape, severe punishment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death - on a daily basis." Each month, 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed, 722 forms of violence are committed against Christians, including beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, forced marriages - and 322 Christians are killed for their faith. Other sources say 105,000 per year.

Yet, persecution results in spiritual life. IDOP says Christians from a Muslim background in Iran have grown from about 500 twenty years ago to over 100,000. Too many to jail, says the government. It's happening in other mideast countries too - because Christians share the Gospel. An IDOP partner says Chinese government officials fear being "prayed out of office," as happened in East Germany.

3- Christian persecution in the Bible - Jesus said, "*If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you.*" He promised the Holy Spirit so you can speak boldly, as He commands. And when you're persecuted you're also purified (1 Peter 1:3-9). "*Have no fear, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect*" (1 Pet 3:8-17). Do not be surprised at trials. "*Rejoice as you share Christ's suffering,*" trusting your faithful Creator, while doing good (1 Pet 4:12-19).

A Syrian believer warns: "It wasn't only ISIS who laid waste to the church. Our cultural compromises with the government and our divisions against each other brewed for a long time. We are Damascus, the seat of Christianity; what happened to us can happen to you. Be careful." A mideast underground leader says, "American persecution is like cancer; it eats away at you, yet you cannot feel it."

Pray for one another. The Bible says Christians are "members" of the one "body" of Christ. And "*if one member suffers, all suffer*" (1 Corinthians 12:26,27). "*Remember those in prison and who are mistreated, since you also are in the body*" (Hebrews 13:1-3). Trust and obey, as God's grace works His purposes.