

## **Introduction: Football Has Begun**

Both college and pro football kicked off their seasons in recent weeks. Who loves football? Or better put, “Who doesn’t love football? As you know, I root for the greatest franchise in history, the Pittsburgh Steelers. They kicked-off their season last week by defeating the Cincinnati “Bungels” in the waning seconds of overtime.

But football has radically changed over the past few years. The old truism, “Defense wins championship” has evolved into “The best defense is a good offense.” Woody Hayes’ iconic “three yards and a cloud of dust” running game has been replaced with an aggressive downfield passing attack which, as most people attest, is much more entertaining.

In the last few weeks of our Supernatural Church series, we have seen the church going on the offensive by spreading God’s Word and doing “Signs and Wonders.” How many do you know the church is always better on the offensive rather than the defensive? As we continue in Acts 5 today, we see church leadership being thrown into jail for a second time (7x total). However, before we dive into the reason of their incarceration, let’s take a detour and look at the origin of church persecution.

## **Why Persecution?**

Why were the religious and political authorities hellbent in stopping such a tiny faith movement? Why is it that Christianity, by far the largest and fastest growing religion in history, is the most persecuted, although it has done far more for humanity than any other? Why is it that starting 2000 years ago the apostles (save one) were martyred along with a staggering 70 million other Christians since then? Why is it that in 2021 alone, some 360 million Christians suffered some form of persecution (1/7) including 186,000 being put to death in places like the Middle East, North Korea, Singapore, and China? Why is it the world touts itself as being “tolerant” but violently intolerant to Christianity?

## **Origin: Glory**

The answer to these questions can be found in pre-universe history. When Lucifer, God’s first, and most glorious archangel, wanted to ascend God’s throne and receive his glory, he ignited a civil war in heaven. When this battle came to earth, Adam and Eve chose the devil’s side when they rebelled against God by not obeying him. In so doing, they handed over their God-given delegated authority to Satan, the angel formerly known as Lucifer, whom Paul later called, “The god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). God told Eve that she would suffer pain in childbirth but nonetheless one of her offspring would rise to up crush Satan’s head (Genesis 3:15). However, after her first son Cain killed her second son, Abel, the war was back on and would include her third son, Seth, from whose lineage Jesus would eventually come. Remember, this war started in pre-physical history because the fallen angel Lucifer/Satan, wanted God’s glory for himself. As Numbers 14:21, and Habakkuk 2:14, explains, his blind ambition goes against the purpose of creation itself.

Jesus, the demonic head crusher, did all things for the glory of his Father and Satan despised him for that. The church also, according to I Corinthians 10:31, is to “do all things for the glory of God” just like Jesus did. Therefore, every time we do our IGPS i.e., Invite someone to Jesus’ church, Give our treasure, Pray for others, and Serve our community, we are spreading the glory of God. Of course, Satan hates us for that because it deflects from the glory he believes he deserves. This mini synopsis helps us understand why persecution against the Church has been a constant throughout history.

### **Back on the Offensive**

After a rough night in the slammer, during which they were miraculously freed by an angel, Peter and John go right back on the offensive to spread the glory of God in the exact place they were arrested, Solomon’s Portico.

Acts 5:25-32 tells us what then happened.

The reason for Christian civil disobedience is twofold: 1) if government prevents us from worshiping God and 2) if it prevents us from spreading God’s Word. Again, the authorities capture the apostles and censure them, “We told you to stop preaching about Jesus!” “Don’t do it again or else.” Fearlessly the apostles respond:

We heard you the first time but we ain’t going to stop because we can’t. With our own eyes we saw God resurrect Jesus. We know he elevated him to his right hand of authority, power, and majesty and conferred upon him the regal titles of Prince and Savior. God has commissioned us to speak in his Name and we will obey him rather than any dictates that come from your black souls and lying tongues.

Power hates to be put on the defensive thus it immediately conspires to kill the apostles. However, one of wisest wise guys in history wisely, asserts (v34-39)

Renown professor Gamaliel, whose most famous student, incidentally and ironically, was Saul, before he became Paul the Apostle, tells the Jewish Supreme Court to reconsider their position:

If this Jesus thing is nonsense, it will fail just like the political uprisings of Theudas and Judas did. Everyone thought these insurrections were of God, but Rome quickly eliminated them.

If it’s of God, you can’t stop it. If it’s not, don’t worry about it! Sounds like good advice for life! The Sanhedrin heed Gamaliel’s advice and ship the apostles out with a flogging and another warning never to speak in Jesus’ name again. Yea right! The church’s response to being persecuted for the second time was identical to the first (v41,42)

They were going to stay on the offensive spreading the glory of God in the Name of Jesus until death stopped them.

### **Conclusion**

As I have mentioned in the past, I believe one of the greatest threats to the Church today is an ideology called “Woke-ism.” Woke-ism is insidious because at a minimum it:

**1) Robs the glory of God in the creative order by redefining basic male/female biology through gender ideology and transgenderism.**

**2) Undermines the truth of God through relativism, an obscuring of right from wrong and wrong from right.**

**3) Usurps the authority of God by making man the measure of all things, not God.**

If left unchecked woke-ism will be the primary rationale to persecute the church in ways we have never experienced before. What is amazing, however, is that woke-ism began with a tiny stream of academics over 100 years ago that slowly and steadily foisted their views on the majority. And the majority, as usual, stayed silent. Ever hear the saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going?” We, like the early church, need to get on the offensive and destroy this demonic ideology before it destroys us.

### **So, let’s fight WOKE with WAKE!**

**W:** Write your representatives, corporate leaders, university administrators and school boards and tell them you oppose the premise, policies, and practices of woke-ism, i.e., discrimination, prejudice, and racism of it. The pen is mightier than the sword so let’s start wielding it.

**A:** Aware. Let us make ourselves aware of the origins and nature of woke ideology. Perhaps the best read on this subject today is Noelle Mering’s, *“Awake, Not Woke.”* It’s a real eye opener!

**K:** Know your Bible. Knowing the Scriptures will arm you with the absolute truth that can set even the woke mind free (John 8:32). We got to know the lies that are being fed to our kids and grandkids. For their sake, let’s learn this stuff and not let them down.

**E:** Engage. Let us engage the “woke” debate in the public square of ideas and opinions. In other words, don’t be afraid to state your biblical perspective. It is far superior to woke ones.

The Church is an unstoppable force when it goes on the offensive. So, let’s go on to be like the lions, not the NFL Detroit Lions (they stink) but the ones Solomon talked about in Proverbs 28:1.

***The righteous are bolder than lions.  
The wicked flee when no one pursues them.***