

heaven.

Let us never forget that God's word tells us, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16), and, "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). While we were sinners, God loved us and gave His Son to die for us! If we are to become like the Father then we, too, must love those in sin [but not love their sinful actions].

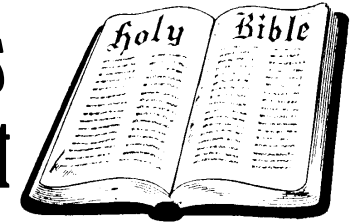
When we are accused, then, of "hate" speech because we are speaking God's word, will it be seen by our accusers and any who may be watching that we are, in fact, people of love? Will we, as Jesus said we must, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)? Will we follow the example of our Lord who, "When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly" (1st Pet. 2:23)? Remember, if we are going to claim to be His followers, the world better be convinced that we mean it by the way we respond to them!

Will You Be Found Guilty of Preaching God's Word? As the likelihood of government persecution and/or prosecution increases, let us also make sure that if someone accuses us of speaking "hateful words" that we can go to Scripture and show without a doubt that our words come from God and are not just our opinions. Far too many today are simply preaching their distaste for certain sinful activities but couldn't defend it from Scripture if their lives depended on it. The thing is, that is what they are doing with many other issues and doctrines that they espouse as "God's word" when, in fact, those things do not come from God at all.

Now is the time to take a stand for the truth — to teach it, to defend it, and to live it. We should not fear what men may do to us as long as we do.

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The Time To Stand Is Now

Recent political news tells me it won't be long before some things that are taught publicly in the pulpits across this country will be scrutinized, criticized, ostracized, and maybe even outlawed altogether. You may have heard that a recent bill passed out of the House Judiciary Committee, called the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (H.R. 1913), and may soon be put to a House-wide vote. While this bill's supposed intent is to add certain "classes" to the federal "hate crimes" laws, one supporter has said that even words that are deemed "hateful" by certain individuals should be prosecutable. As we could have predicted, those "hateful words" include condemnation from Scripture of sins such as homosexuality and any other sexual perversions. [I say that because such terminology is already being used to describe word-for-word readings from Scripture that condemn homosexuality and other sexual perversions.] I expect if this bill passes, it will not be long before someone records a sermon that condemns homosexuality or uses an article published in a bulletin or religious paper to bring charges against the one who spoke or wrote those "hateful" words.

I could spend some time reminding some readers that their political choices [or even their indifference] brought this about and how many devout people tried to warn us that choosing political leaders whose stand on moral issues was contrary to God's laws would lead to this; I could spend some time chastising those who openly supported political

leaders based on hopes of material gain, rather than any moral issue at all; or, I could spend time talking about the inconsistency of thought and outright hypocritical actions that are involved in justifying support of such political leaders. But I won't do any of that. Not today.

I believe much time is wasted by brethren on arguments about political solutions to this country's immorality while far too little is said about what we are going to do about it personally, and far too little is done to show that our faith is not in any governmental institution or party, but in God. You see, it is one thing to run to our governmental leaders for relief or protection when our Constitutional right to "free exercise" is threatened, and another to simply follow God's ways without regard to possible consequences. What happens when our government ceases defending that right? What happens when it becomes the source of our persecution? Who will you run to and what will you do when the government agency or organization that was supposed to defend you and uphold your rights ceases doing that? What will you do then?

With that in mind, I have a few questions I would like to ask you about what we are going to do about the matter of this country's lack of morality and the certainty that some things now taught from the Bible in public places will be prosecutable as a federal crime.

Will You Continue to Speak the Truth? In the first century, Christians had to face the fact that their leaders were not, in fact, going to defend their right to practice their faith in the way God would have them. From the beginning, when the apostles healed the man who had been lame since birth (Acts 3:1-10) and they then began preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the people (3:11-4:2), they faced opposition and persecution from their leaders (4:2-21; 5:12-40). But in these cases, they did not seek government intervention or bring a lawsuit; they simply strengthened themselves (4:23-32), let it be known that they would follow God (4:19, 20; 5:29), and went out and preached the truth (4:31; 5:41, 42)!

That is not to say that we cannot use our government's processes to further the spread of the truth or to defend ourselves. We know that the apostle Paul appealed to Cæsar and used that right as a Roman citizen to make God's word known wherever he was taken (Acts 21-28). But Paul also did not put his trust in the government to defend his right to practice his faith! He trusted in God — and was willing to accept that he may even have to die for it (cf. Acts 21:13; Phlp. 1:20-26). He certainly desired to be free and to live, but he didn't rest all hope in the whims of man. He knew that, with Christ, all things were possible and, with Christ, he could find reasons to rejoice in whatever situation he may have been.

So, what will we do? Will we continue to stand for the truth and answer, as did the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men"? Will we continue to preach the truth in the hearing of others, though we could save ourselves from trouble [and jail or fines] by simply doing it quietly? Daniel, when he heard of the new prohibition against petitioning anyone but the king for 30 days, went to his home, opened the window, and prayed to God as was his custom (Dan. 6:10). He could have left the window closed and no one may have ever discovered what he was doing, but he chose to continue doing it as he always had. Consider the difference Daniel's actions made in the lives of others!

Will You Love Those Who Persecute You? I find it just a little ironic that those who may be preaching God's message of love for mankind have been accused of speaking what is now called "hate speech" by those who despise the message. [Could we accuse them of "hate speech" because they freely admit to hating the message of repentance?] At the same time, I must admit that the way some preach the message of God's word, it sure sounds hateful! I honestly wonder if some who preach even the truth actually have a love for those in sin because of how they present the message! Some professing believers are so repulsed by those who live lives without restraint that it appears by their words and deeds that they would much rather see them burn in hell than saved in