

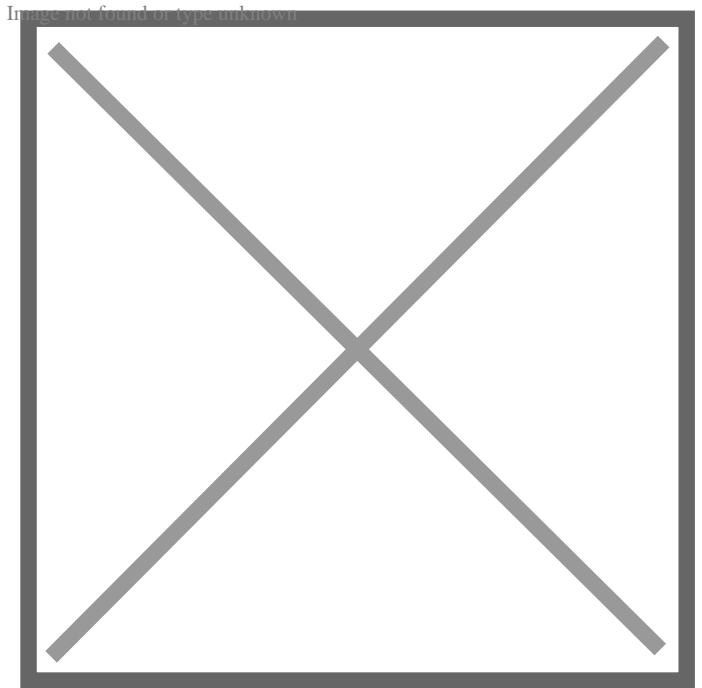
The unforgivable crime

The Spice Box

by Sharon Robertson, Lt. Colonel –

The Lenten season is upon us, and once again our thoughts turn from celebrating the birth of the Baby in Bethlehem to all that Jesus taught us in the final weeks of his earthly ministry, the days leading up to his crucifixion.

Jesus was persecuted, arrested, tried and put to death—not because he had committed a heinous crime, but because he had committed righteousness, a crime that society could not forgive. The holier the life, the more uncomfortable the observer who is forced to evaluate his own life in comparison to that of the holy one. The worldly-minded do not happily tolerate discomfort.



“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also,” Jesus warned his disciples.

But all that was nearly two thousand years ago. Christianity is big business these days. Politicians prove their earnestness and integrity by publicly thanking God for his blessings. The evidence of the success of religious leaders is published to the world as they dress in designer outfits, drive designer cars, and live in designer homes. Sometimes it seems as though successful ministry can be measured by the number of BMWs in the parking lot. The hostility of the world seems to be one legacy that has passed our generation by. Or has it?

Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

Why has the modern church seemed to suffer so little persecution? Has righteousness, the holy example, become so accepted and admired by the world that the world no longer has to fear or be uncomfortable in the presence of true righteousness?

Or has the world become so accepted and admired by the church that the church no longer sets an example of righteousness and holy living? Just a thought—don’t let it bother you...

...unless, of course, you really believe that the standard for holy living is the standard set by Christ.

Jesus never won a disciple by showing off his seamless garment. But he made a lot of enemies by making people aware of sin in their own lives. Even today the holy life is only admired by the world

when it doesn't interfere with the world's pleasures and practices. Militant, active Christian involvement in social causes wins enemies; the earnest, praying mother may sometimes win the antagonism of her children; the faithful witness may irritate the woman unwilling to listen; the Scripture-based advice of a godly pastor may achieve only the enmity of a man under conviction. And sometimes—just sometimes—sincere servants of Christ may persecute and destroy other sincere servants of Christ in the mistaken belief that they are doing God a favor.

Jesus did not set out to destroy those who hated him, but to win them. He was not preparing his disciples for a safe, comfortable life; he was equipping them to live victoriously in a hostile, non-Christian world. He was preparing them to be winners! *He was preparing us to be winners.* He set the example of effective servanthood. He taught us to love as God loves. He promised to remember us, to return for us, so that we may live with him forever. He authorized us to come before God in his name. He sent the Counselor-Advocate-Comforter to dwell with and in us. He gifted us with a peace so profound that it surpasses all human understanding. And he made it possible for us to experience the deep, unquenchable joy that comes from obedience to his commands, and abiding in his love.