

Religious Liberty



Persecution

In matters concerning the kingdom of Christ **no compulsion or forcing of conscience is permitted**. No blood is to be shed, no force of arms employed, no prison is to be opened for the incarceration of one who does not choose the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Christ will accept only of the voluntary service of the heart which has been sanctified through the truth. . . . In every council where important decisions are made, heavenly agencies watch with intense interest. There is an unseen presence in the midst of the counselors, and the manifestation of harshness, of levity, of carelessness, of partiality, is registered as an offense against God. (*RH* March 26, 1895, par. 5)

We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and **God holds us responsible for the influence we exert over others.** Throw a pebble into the lake, and a wave is formed, and another, and another; and as they increase, the circle widens, until they reach the very shore. Thus our influence, though apparently insignificant, may continue to extend far beyond our knowledge or control. It is as impossible for us to determine the result . . . (*HS 143.5*)

You all have an influence for good or for evil on the minds and characters of others. And just the influence which you exert is **written in the book of records in heaven**. An angel is attending you and taking record of your words and actions. When you rise in the morning, do you feel your helplessness and your need of strength from God? and do you humbly, heartily make known your wants to your heavenly Father? If so, angels mark your prayers, and if these prayers have not gone forth out of feigned lips, when you are in danger of unconsciously doing wrong and exerting an influence which will lead others to do wrong, **your guardian angel will be by your side, prompting you to a better course, choosing your words for you, and influencing your actions.** (*CCh* 184.2)

When unconsciously we are in danger of exerting a wrong influence, the **angels will be by our side**, prompting us to a better course, choosing our words for us, and influencing our actions. (*COL* 341, 342)

The laws of Christ's kingdom are unalterable; for **they have their foundation in his own unchangeable righteous character.**

Not one of his precepts will be weakened or altered in the slightest degree. Heaven and earth will pass away rather than one tittle of his law shall fail. There can be no amendment made to the law of God; for "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." **Should the voice of the highest human authority announce an amendment or an addition to the law of God in any human legislature, such an announcement would be registered on the books of heaven as treason.** It would be placed on the same list as the presumptuous claims of the first great rebel who was cast out from heaven. (*RH* March 26, 1895, par. 4)

Persecution

- ❖ The wicked in *his* pride doth persecute the poor: Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. (Psalm 10:2)
- ❖ My times *are* in thy hand: Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. (Psalm 31:15)
- ❖ Hotly chase after, pursue

❖ Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

- ❖ Persecute—*dioko*
- ❖ to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective, *hasten, run, press on*
- ❖ to harass someone especially because of beliefs, *persecute*
- ❖ to cause to run or set in motion, *drive away, drive out*
- ❖ to follow in haste in order to find something, *run after, pursue*

The Jews pursued Paul from the time of his conversion. For example, the same Jews who caused trouble in Thessalonica, pursued Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Berea.

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. (Acts 17:13)

And there came thither [to Lystra, v. 8] *certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead. (Acts 14:19) The Jews from Antioch traveled more than 100 miles to hamper the work of the apostles.

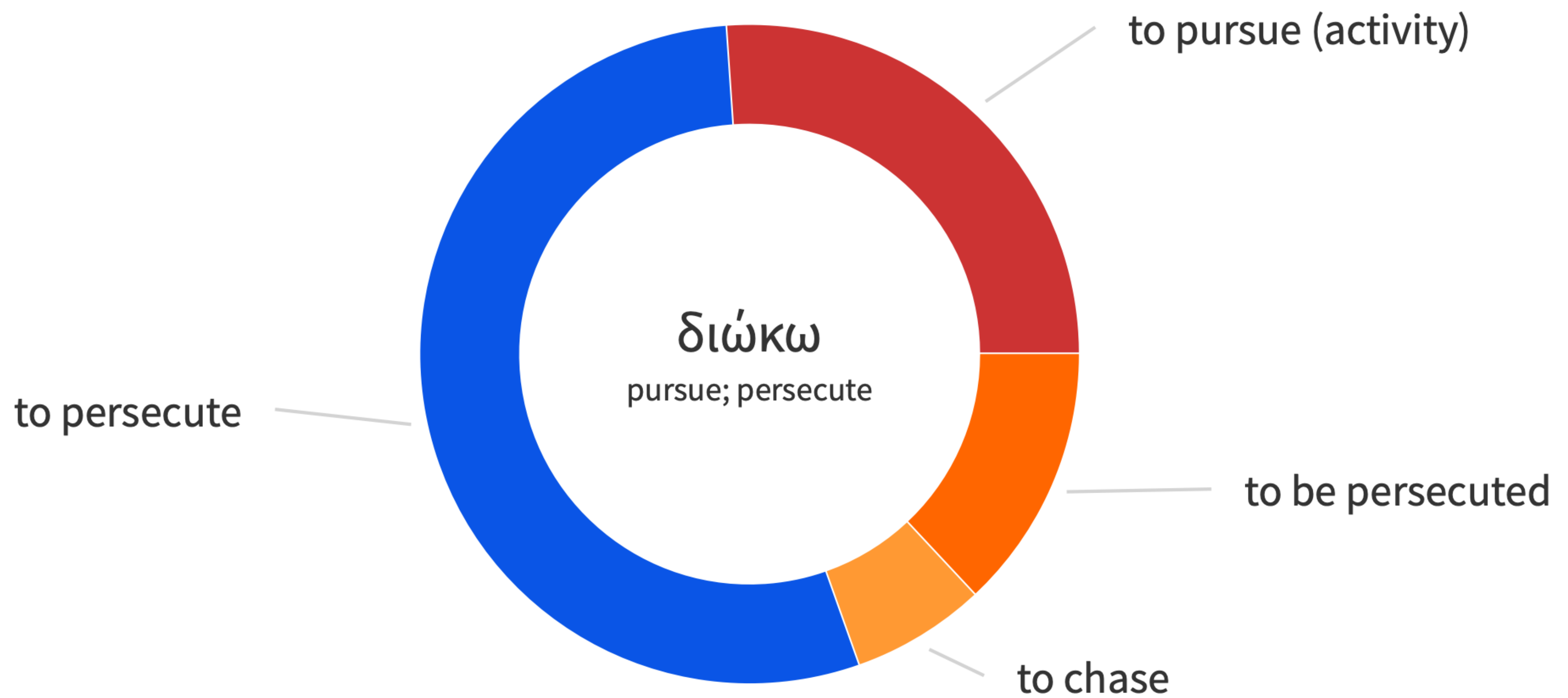
- ❖ To systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people (Matthew 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16)
- ❖ In a number of languages the equivalent of 'to persecute' is simply 'to cause to suffer,' but persecution is also expressed in terms of 'to be mean to' or 'to threaten' or 'to chase from place to place.' (Louw-Nida)

❖ Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you,
and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner
of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
(Matthew 5:11)

❖ James 1:5; Matthew 11:20

❖ Revile—*ōnēidizō*—reproach, mock, heap insults upon, upbraid; to reproach someone with the implication that the individual is to blame

❖ For my sake—on account of me



❖ *dioko* also can mean “to pursue without hostility, to follow, follow after,” such as **righteousness**, Romans 9:30; the Law, Romans 9:31; 12:13, **hospitality** (“given to”) literally “pursuing” (as one would **a calling**), the **things which make for peace**, Romans 14:19; love, 1 Corinthians 14:1; **that which is good**, 1 Thessalonians 5:15; righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, 1 Timothy 6:11; righteousness, faith, love, peace, 2 Timothy 2:22; peace and sanctification, Hebrews 12:14; peace, 1 Peter 3:11; “**to follow on**,” Philippians 3:12, 14, or in RV “**I press on**.” (Vine’s Dictionary)

❖ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city: (Matthew 23:34)

- ❖ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (Matthew 5:44)
- ❖ But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. (Matthew 10:23)

- ❖ Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. (Luke 11:47, 48)
- ❖ But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. (Luke 21:12)

- ❖ The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. (John 5:15–16)
- ❖ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (John 15:20)

How God bore with the Jewish nation, while they were murmuring, rebellious, breaking the Sabbath and every other precept of the law. He repeatedly declared them worse than the heathen. **Each generation surpassed the preceding in guilt.** The Lord permitted them to go into captivity, but after their deliverance, his requirements were forgotten. **Everything** that He committed to that people to be kept sacred was perverted or displaced by the inventions of rebellious men. Christ said to them in his day, “Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?” And these were the men who set themselves up as judges and censors over those whom the Holy Spirit was moving to declare the Word of God to the people.

(11LtMs, *Lt 38*, 1896, par. 37)

Who Am I?

- ❖ Full of faith
- ❖ Did great wonders and miracles
- ❖ Spoke with wisdom and with the Spirit
- ❖ Was brought before the council where false witnesses were set up against him

❖ All that sat in the council saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel.

❖ Acts 6:8–7:2

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?
and they have slain them which shewed before of the
coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the
betrayers and murderers: (Acts 7:52)

Acts 7:55–60

Stephen



Rembrandt

If the blood of Christ's faithful witnesses were shed at this time, it would not, like the blood of the martyrs, be as seed sown to yield a harvest for God. Their fidelity would not be a testimony to convince others of the truth . . . (*GC* 634.1)

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. The church believers in Christ had been taught by the wonderful Teacher, the Majesty of heaven. What zeal was in their midst, what faith and devotion to the work. Of these spiritual works it is stated Jesus was not ashamed to call them brethren. [Hebrews 2:11.] There was a constant increase of young members, and the whole city was moved by the divine movings of the Lord among them. Stephen was full of faith and power. (*4LtMs*, Ms 17, 1885, par. 12)

The enemies of God and the truth felt stirred with hatred and opposition. Satan impelled them to resist the truth. Stephen had to meet in argument the most artful, deceptive disputants, hoping to confuse and put down his arguments. **If Stephen had not searched the Scriptures and himself become fortified with the evidence of God's Word, he could not have borne the test;** but he knew the foundation of his faith was firm, and he was ready to answer his opponents. Stephen came off victorious. He spoke with assurance and wisdom and power that astonished and confounded the enemies of truth. (*4LtMs*, Ms 17, 1885, par. 12)

When they found themselves baffled and defeated at every attempt, then they were bent on his destruction. Had these professedly honest and wise men been really seeking for the truth, they would have admitted evidence which they could not controvert. They would have acknowledged their error and yielded to the convincing arguments of truth and been on the Lord's side and on the side of truth. But such was not their purpose or character. They hated Christ, they hated all His followers, and they put Stephen to death. If they could not controvert his arguments, they could stop his mouth by stoning him to death, which they did. (*4LtMs*, Ms 17, 1885, par. 12)

There are many living martyrs today who suffer in silence, who trust in God when they are abused with the tongue and who are tantalized, who are hurt and wounded by coarse, harsh denunciations, whose lot seems to be to live and to suffer, receiving comfort only from Jesus who is the Source of their strength. Such souls are missionaries. They are Christ's noble ones, and their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Remember, Jesus knows it all—every sorrow, every grief—He will not leave you to sink, for His arms are beneath you. (*1LtMs*, Ms 9, 1868, par. 10, 11)

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, **why persecutest thou me?** And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

(Acts 9:4–5)

And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: **for it is not fit that he should live.** And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,
(Acts 22:22–23)

For we have found this man *a pestilent fellow*, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: (Acts 24:5)

The dark cloud of human transgression came between the Father and the Son. The interruption of the communion between God and His Son caused a condition of things in the heavenly courts which cannot be described by human language. Nature could not witness such a scene as Christ dying in agony while bearing the penalty of man's transgression. **God and the angels clothed themselves with darkness, and hid the Saviour** from the gaze of the curious multitude while He drank the last dregs of the cup of God's wrath (Letter 139, 1898). (*5BC* 1108.3)

When He leaves the sanctuary, **darkness** covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. **Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble.** As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old. (*GC 614.1*)

A single angel destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and filled the land with mourning. When David offended against God by numbering the people, one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, **will be exercised by evil angels** when He permits. There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere. (*GC 614.2*)

Those who honor the law of God have been accused of bringing judgments upon the world, and they will be regarded as the cause of the fearful convulsions of nature and the strife and bloodshed among men that are filling the earth with woe.

The power attending the last warning has enraged the wicked; their anger is kindled against all who have received the message, and Satan will excite to still greater intensity the **spirit of hatred and persecution.** (*GC 614.3*)

When God's presence was finally withdrawn from the Jewish nation, **priests and people knew it not**. Though under the control of Satan, and swayed by the most horrible and malignant passions, **they still regarded themselves as the chosen of God**. The ministrations in the temple continued; sacrifices were offered upon its polluted altars, and daily the divine blessing was invoked upon a people guilty of the blood of God's dear Son and seeking to slay His ministers and apostles. (*GC 615.1*)

So when the irrevocable decision of the sanctuary has been pronounced and the destiny of the world has been forever fixed, **the inhabitants of the earth will know it not. The forms of religion will be continued** by a people from whom the Spirit of God has been finally withdrawn; and the satanic zeal with which the prince of evil will inspire them for the accomplishment of his malignant designs, will bear the semblance of zeal for God. (*GC 615.1*)

As the Sabbath has become the special point of controversy throughout Christendom, and religious and secular authorities have combined to enforce the observance of the Sunday, the persistent refusal of a small minority to yield to the popular demand will make them objects of universal execration. It will be urged that the few who stand in opposition to an institution of the church and a law of the state ought not to be tolerated; that it is better for them to suffer than for whole nations to be thrown into confusion and lawlessness. (*GC 615.2*)

The same argument many centuries ago was brought against Christ by the “rulers of the people.” “It is expedient for us,” said the wily Caiaphas, “that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” John 11:50.

This argument will appear conclusive; and a decree will finally be issued against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, denouncing them as deserving of the severest punishment and giving the people liberty, after a certain time, to put them to death. Romanism in the Old World and apostate Protestantism in the New will pursue a similar course toward those who honor all the divine precepts. (*GC* 615.2)

The people of God **will then** be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress described by the prophet as the time of Jacob's trouble. "Thus saith the Lord: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.... All faces are turned into paleness. Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:5–7. (*GC* 616.1)

But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted
him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.
(Galatians 4:29)

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us
together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
(Ephesians 2:5)

Persecution in its varied forms is the development of a principle which will exist as long as Satan exists and Christianity has vital power. No man can serve God without enlisting against himself the opposition of the hosts of darkness. Evil angels will assail him, alarmed that his influence is taking the prey from their hands. Evil men, rebuked by his example, will unite with them in seeking to separate him from God by alluring temptations. When these do not succeed, then a compelling power is employed to force the conscience. (*GC 610.2*)

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12)

The church appeals to the strong arm of civil power, and, in this work, papists and Protestants unite. As the movement for Sunday enforcement becomes more bold and decided, the law will be invoked against commandment keepers. They will be threatened with **finer and imprisonment**, and some will be **offered positions of influence, and other rewards** and advantages, as inducements to renounce their faith. But their steadfast answer is: “Show us from the word of God our error. (*GC 607.1*)

As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, **these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.**

(GC 608.2)

And from Jesus Christ, *who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, (Revelation 1:5)*

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write;
These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness,
the beginning of the creation of God; (Revelation 3:14)