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HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS

LESSON 18

QUAKERS – PART 2

The Religious Society of Friends grew very rapidly in England in the 1640's and 1650's. Their teachings, manner of worship, and very conservative behaviors were radically different than the religious establishment, the people, and the government. The government would not tolerate these radicals who seemed to go against all established customs and values. Their show of emotion in religious gatherings was considered irreverent, even blasphemous in the view of some.

As this gave rise to intense persecution, some of the Friends began to look elsewhere to escape it. In the 1620's the Pilgrims had left England to cross the Atlantic to the New World of North America. Many Friends, or Quakers, decided to do the same. During the 1650's thousands of them had left England and settled in the colonies.

Unfortunately, they faced the same persecution there that followed them by reputation from England. Records that were preserved from the General Court in Boston show just how they were treated. The following notes are highlights of the government's court's rulings against Quakers:

1656: The court called them "a cursed sect of heretics" who presume to be "sent by God and infallibly assisted by the (Holy) Spirit to speak..." and "despising government, and the order of God, in the church" and "seeking to turn people from the faith", (that meaning the government approved church), that any such person who arrives in this country of such persuasion shall upon entrance into this country be committed to the House of Correction where they shall be severely whipped and not permitted to speak with anyone.

The court also ruled that any person found in possession of any book or writing from the Quaker's shall be fined five pounds (a very large sum) or whipped until they paid that sum of money.

1657: Boston's General Court ruled that any person who either directly or indirectly brings any Quaker into its jurisdiction would be fined one hundred pounds and put in prison until the fine is paid. Furthermore, any person who entertains or shelters a Quaker shall be fined forty shillings per hour of such contact. Furthermore, any Quaker caught shall have one of his ears cut off and committed to the House of Corrections for labor until released. If caught a second time the other ear would be cut off. Women would be whipped instead of losing an ear. If caught a third time, his tongue would be bored through with a hot iron at the House of Corrections.

1658 and 1659: Boston's court now proceeded to order execution for some of the Quakers. This is how the New World welcomed them to the Americas.

Over time this persecution eased up, although the Quakers still were not well received in general. Tomorrow we shall pursue how that came about and the long-term impact it had for our own future nation of the United States of America.