

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION: THE CALL TO SUFFER

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“For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

When you hear of Christian persecution, what images come to mind? An employee ridiculed for the open Bible on her desk? A student reprimanded for wearing a T-shirt with a Christian theme?

Beyond our sheltered country, persecution of Christians comes in many forms—loss of customers, estrangement from family, fines, imprisonment, exclusion of children from school, the destruction of a house church, eviction, torture, and even death. And it’s happening in Laos, Belarus, Algeria, Jordan, India, Uzbekistan, Egypt, and Cuba, as well as many other countries.

Christians in countries like Jordan live in fear of the consequences of the discovery of their faith. Earlier this year, a Christian of fifteen years was charged with apostasy because of his faith. Among other things, he was beaten, lost custody of his children, and had his marriage dissolved by the courts.

Many countries claim to protect religious freedom while Christians continue to be imprisoned for the display of their faith. According to a report by Christian Freedom International, “Although the Lao constitution ‘guarantees’ freedom of religion and worship, [they restrict]...the activity of the church.” On July 20, “police stormed into the [Boukham] church that Sunday and ordered the 63 Christians present to cease worshiping or they would face arrest and imprisonment for ‘believing and worshiping God.’”

Christians live in many countries without any support—no church and no appearance of religious freedom. Unfortunately, some of these countries also will commit violence to stomp out Christianity. Samaritan’s Purse reported that in Ethiopia in 2006, “militants have pillaged and burned more than 350 homes.” Thirty-one people were killed and 250 taken hostage, while some were forced to convert to Islam. Churches were razed and converted to mosques. The International Society for Human Rights reported that an Egyptian man was beheaded because his conversion to Christianity was a danger to the public order.

It shouldn’t surprise us that Muslim extremists burned a church building in Nigeria because it was physically too close to a mosque, according to a report by Christians in Crisis. Or that a Saudi member of the religious police cut off his daughter’s tongue and burned her to death for converting to Christianity, according to a report by Voice of the Martyrs. Or that Christians in Orissa, India, are being “forced to flee into the jungles as their homes are being looted, demolished and burned,” according to a report by Christian Aid Mission. Or even that during the three months surrounding the Olympics, the Chinese government required pastors to promise not to “organize or attend any religious gatherings that were not approved by the Communist regime,” according to a Baptist Press report.

It shouldn’t surprise us that these events are in today’s news, but it does. Second Timothy 3:12 says, “In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” In John 15:20-23, Jesus says, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...they will do all these things to you on account of My name, because they don’t know the One who sent Me.”

Sometimes the battle for freedom and against persecution seems far removed from America, where believers enjoy a significant amount of religious freedom and are more likely to experience discrimination than actual persecution. However, we cannot accept distance as an excuse for ignoring the reality for the body of Christ today. The time for prayer is now, and the need is just as urgent as it was during Jesus’ day.

How can you be involved in the war against persecution? Get informed by connecting with a trustworthy organization and receiving their newsletter and prayer alerts. Pray fervently and specifically, and support them financially if possible. Speak out against persecution by writing to your governmental representatives and the editors of newspapers.

Looking at the horror of persecution around the world is a harsh reality, but it is not the end. There is a hope, for “The God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will personally restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little. To Him be the dominion forever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10-11).

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from Voice of the Martyrs...

On August 6, 2008, Pastor Zhang “Bike” Mingxuan, one of China’s best-known evangelists, was arrested and imprisoned by Chinese police. Pastor Bike, who traveled around the country by bicycle, was instrumental in the creation of the Olympic Prayer Bands. The wristbands brought the persecuted church in China to the minds of Christians everywhere for the purpose of prayer, but they also brought more attention from Chinese officials. More than 58,000 people participated in the international petition effort to secure his freedom, and he was finally released on August 29 in good health and “praising God.” Unfortunately, the attacks on Pastor Bike’s family have continued. On Oct. 16, as he was traveling, his apartment was ransacked and his wife and two sons attacked by the Public Security Bureau. One son was beaten to unconsciousness.

Chinese officials also have attempted to shut down the house church where Pastor Bike preaches. On Oct. 10, police sealed the door of the church and blocked it with two truckloads of garbage, even though the government had given the church permission to meet, China Aid said. “During the past 22 years, Pastor Bike has been arrested 26 times, beaten and evicted from his home numerous times because of his faith,” the human rights group said. “Despite the persecution, this family continues to boldly preach and help the house church Christians.”

Voice of the Martyrs, China Aid Association, Baptist Press

Chinese authorities insist that Christians worship only in government-controlled churches. Despite harassment, fines, and the possibility of prison, millions of Protestants and Catholics continue to attend unauthorized assemblies, including in private homes. (AP Photo/Str)

resources online

www.christiansincrisis.net

Christians In Crisis is a prayer advocacy ministry that prays for the persecuted church worldwide and the people who persecute them.

www.persecution.com

Voice of the Martyrs at persecution.com has been giving a voice to the persecuted church since 1967.

www.uscirf.gov

USCIRF was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.