

Persecution of Christians

Just last week, I noticed two articles on Foxnews.com that highlighted the persecution of Christians. One dealt with the continual crackdown of the Chinese government of churches that are not state-sanctioned. Sometimes church leaders are imprisoned and tortured. Sometimes the method of “soft” persecution is used. This could mean things like the government getting the power or water company to cut off supply to the places where the churches meet. The practical headache from such things are obvious. The government may force a landlord to quit renting out meeting space to churches. I also read of Christian Ethiopians who had gone to Saudi Arabia for work. These were arrested for practicing their faith in this strict Muslim country. We have mentioned prayer requests several times for different Christians pastors in Iran who have been imprisoned for their faith. Saeed Abedini, an American citizen, is currently imprisoned in the notoriously brutal Evin Prison. His wife and two young children live in Idaho, longing and praying for his release. We mentioned several prayer requests from our Primitive Baptist brethren in India who face some forms of persecution as well. Many more cases could be mentioned from countries like Vietnam, Egypt, North Korea, and many others. What does all this have to do with you and I in Collierville, Tennessee?

Hebrews 13:3 commands us, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” “Them that are in bonds” speaks of those who were bound, or imprisoned for Christ’s sake. So, we are called to be mindful and prayerful of fellow Christians who suffer great adversity for their faith in Christ. I would encourage you, if you do not already do this, to make prayer for persecuted Christians a regular part of your requests that you offer before the Lord. I would also love to hear our brethren pray for the same in our public prayers in our church assemblies. What should we pray for them? Here are a few suggestions: 1. Strength and faith to continue standing for Christ. 2. Encouragement and comfort from the Lord even in their great hardship. 3. Their release and freedom. 4. That their testimony even in persecution would be a shining light and testimony, like Paul and Silas in Acts 16. 5. That God might soften the hearts of those who do them wrong.

Additionally, their condition reminds us that we should be willing to suffer the same if God’s providence dictates that in our circumstances. None of us relish such a thought, but we all recognize that Christ demands our faithfulness in freedom and in suffering. Their example reminds us that Christ is that worthy of our faithfulness. Though it may be hard for us to grasp, Philippians 1:29 tells us that not only our faith in Christ, but also suffering for His sake are both gifts from God!

In closing, as we think and pity our brethren who suffer such things, let us also remember what Jesus says about them, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12). Lastly, Paul speaks in Romans 8 that Christ’s love is so strong that nothing can separate from it, not even persecution! (Rom. 8:35).

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