



Are Christians Still Being Persecuted in China?

JUNE 2012



This is a question that I am often asked by many. Some have heard that it is a thing of the past, others are hearing voices dedicated to report the abuses of the persecuted Church. The following article by Randy Alcorn addresses this issue.

Compared to earlier decades, religious persecution in China is less extreme. In some places there is little or no persecution. Local officials may look the other way even if they suspect Christians are meeting illegally (as most in China do).

In other cases, where Christians were once jailed for assembling without permission, they may now be ostracized, and not permitted to hold significant positions of influence in government, education, or business.

In other places, Chinese Christians continue to experience extreme persecution. **In fact, it is likely that more Christians in China are currently in prison for their faith than in any other country.** Reports from unregistered churches continue to confirm that thousands of Chinese Christians are still imprisoned for following Jesus, and many are still beaten and abused in prison. I have seen recent photos of tortured believers and have wept at their stories.

It is still illegal to teach children under 18 about God and Jesus.

It is still illegal for three or more believers to gather for religious purposes without government approval. **Eighty percent of Chinese Christians are part of unregistered illegal churches,** because they say Christ is Lord, and they cannot allow an atheistic government to control their churches. Some western Christians have naively criticized unregistered churches, without understanding that they cannot in good conscience bow their knees to a government whose hands have long been stained by the blood of Christians.

In 2001, Pastor Ling was producing Christian materials. He was interrogated in his home by police officers. **He refused to lead officials to his Christian co-workers so they placed each hand on a table and held it down, pulling out his fingernails, one by one.** He was then forced to spend three years in a "re-education through labor" camp. **Though beaten and burned with cigarettes, he refused to deny his faith.**

A major crackdown in 2004 against unregistered church groups resulted in the arrest of hundreds of Christians. **A 28-year-old Christian teacher and a 34-year-old female evangelist were among those beaten to death while in police custody.**

In 2005, 100 security officers from five Chinese government agencies raided a conference of 140 house-church leaders and ten guest pastors in northeastern China. **The police, accompanied by the Religious Affairs Bureau, seized Bibles and Christian study materials, and arrested many attendees, including two American pastors who were detained, questioned and deported.**

In 2007, a Beijing house church leader, Hua Huiqi, served six months in prison. According to China Aid Association (CAA), Hua and his 76-year-old mother were arrested after being attacked by seven police officers. While walking on a public street, they were kicked to the ground and taken to the Olympic police station for questioning. Hua's mother was later sentenced to two years in prison.



Recent persecution reports

At the end of March 2012, a house church in Heilongjiang province held a Bible training session that was raided by officials from the Bureau of Religious Affairs. **More than 150 church leaders were apprehended, including 10 foreigners.** The local government has imposed a strict news blackout and threatened family members to keep quiet.

On April 14, 2012 53 local house church leaders were arrested in Ye county, Henan province, while holding a Bible study. **To date, more than 20 people remain in custody.**

On April 22, 2012 local government officials led more than a dozen mafia types masquerading as Christians to the Hongqiao Church in Xianan District, **where they smashed open the donation box and stole the money, then changed the locks on the church doors.** They also forced all the Christians to leave the church, and beat Elder Xu Shizhen. Leading the attack were the directors of the religious affairs bureau. In the past two years, one of the church's lay leaders who frequently takes the pulpit and preaches, ShiShanghai, has been beaten three times by these government officials.

On Nov. 17, 2011, the Sijiqing police station in Handan city, Hebei province raided a Bible study course with more than 30 people in attendance and **forcibly confiscated furniture, equipment and books without going through any of the legally required procedures.** Among the items confiscated were a musical keyboard, table and three chairs, copies of the Old and New Testaments and other books.

Those who deny persecution often say they visited China and saw Bibles for sale in a store, or a registered church. (That's true; registered churches are permitted to have Bibles.) An American Christian leader assured me that he and his ministry preached the gospel in China and had cordial meetings with communist government leaders. I rejoice in this. But he then spoke of the "misconception" that Christians are still persecuted in China. Unfortunately, the documented incidents demonstrate it's not a misconception, but a reality.



A Chinese Christian told me "somewhere in China the sun is always shining, and somewhere the snow is always falling." In other words, there's always freedom somewhere and persecution somewhere else. Visitors to China rarely go to the countryside where much persecution takes place. They will not be given an audience with persecuted Christians. Believers will not step forward to share their stories with visitors who are escorted by or traveling under the favor of government officials!

It is irresponsible to claim that Christians are no longer in prison or beaten or discriminated against, simply because the visitor doesn't see this happening, or because Chinese officials and government tour guides say it doesn't happen. Should we believe the government (who denied persecution even under Mao), or the actual Chinese Christians, most of whom remain in unregistered churches, despite the great cost of their doing so?

ChinaAid (www.chinaaid.org), Asia Harvest (www.asiaharvest.org), and Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.com) provide current information about persecution in China. **We encourage you to stay informed about—and to intercede for—our Chinese brothers and sisters.** While we should rejoice that persecution has lessened significantly in some places, let's be careful not to perpetuate the lie that Christians are no longer persecuted in China..

ITINERARY

June 3	Clear Mountain Community Church Williamsburg, Ohio
June 3	Faith Chapel Bethel, Ohio
June 4	Home Meeting Ft Mitchell, KY
June 5	Home Meeting Brookville, IN
June 6	Heartland Ministries Sharpsville, IN
June 10,11	Resurrection Life Church - Cadillac, MI

Personally

Dear Friends,

In 17 years of China ministry we have had only a few bumps with the Chinese authorities over our evangelistic activities. We have been very successful at avoiding serious trouble, but we have had a few nervous moments.

One night we were awakened three times and summoned for questioning; having all our materials confiscated. Another time, a dozen police showed up with a local TV crew detaining us for 6 hours for interrogation while the cameras rolled. Other times by God's help we were hidden from detection and by the Spirit's warning have narrowly escaped police confrontation.

At God's instruction we have often changed our course in mid stream, shut down meetings and changed travel plans at a moments notice, only to discover later we had been protected by God's guidance. These occasions made our hearts beat a little faster and the adrenaline pump a little harder!

Next month we will return to China for more illegal activities. We invite your prayers for the Chinese Churches and for our mission.

Your gifts of support are greatly appreciated as we continue to make financial commitments in partnering with the network leaders in evangelism and Church planting.

For those who have never heard,

Bill & Susan Otten

