



PRAY FOR PERSECUTED BROTHERS & SISTERS

Pray for the Persecuted Christians in China

Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the Body also.

(Hebrews 13:3)



China

Total Population: 1,439,323,776

Self-Proclaimed Christian Population: 9% – **Evangelical Witness: 8%**

Largest Religion: Non-Religious: 44%

Death Rate: 8.2/1000 per year: Just today: 32,335

Absolute control: How China Is Suffocating Christianity

(Christopher Summers, Open Doors, 21 January 2020)

China is cracking down on religion. That much is obvious. From church demolitions, to the arrests of pastors, to the restriction of Bibles, to the law that bans children from church-the patterns are clear.

But the dramatic examples and videos of crosses tumbling off church steeples or pastors handcuffed are not the norm. Persecution in China looks different now than it did 20-30 years ago-it's less the flash of violence or imprisonment (though those still happen) and more a steady squeeze that tries to cut off the air supply of the church in China.

The government in China is trying to suffocate the faith of Chinese Christians. Here's how:

1. They're wielding unprecedented technological power. The technological capabilities of the Chinese government are as good or better than any other government's in the world. Most of the world's leading technology companies build their devices in China, but China has also made its own technological investment a key goal for the next 10 years. Their technological advancements have made their tech spread around the world.

But that technology is increasingly put to use in ways that threaten to strangle the church in China. China monitors all internet usage in the country, banning some services like Facebook outright, and carefully keeping tabs on the service WeChat used throughout China. This means religious speech is always under the microscope.

Under the promise of "security," China has forcibly installed surveillance cameras in some churches, and churches around the country have seen cameras installed in their sanctuaries and lobbies. Churches that refuse can be shut down and pastors can be sent to jail.

China also has a vast facial recognition system. When used in combination with the surveillance system, it means that the Chinese government could potentially track every single person who sets foot in a church building. And since they have power over almost every part of daily life for the average Chinese citizen, being able to track Chinese believers means Christians are always worshiping under the watchful eye of the Communist state.

2. They're targeting young people-and their parents.

In 2018, new religious regulations went into effect in China. One of the specific parts of the law was a restating of an existing law that had lacked clarity. It banned any children under the age of 18 from attending church.

The new regulations also forbid church youth camps, warn young Christians not to share their faith at school and tighten religious education. In China, where educational success can determine the quality of a person's life, these kinds of threats can be devastating to the faith of young believers, and to their parents.

"We know of some school teachers who warn children that if they follow Jesus they may not be allowed to graduate," says Pastor Jacob*, a Chinese church leader who recently attended an Open Doors training seminar. "This creates a terrible struggle in young people's hearts. They are torn between living free in the truth of who they really are, versus possible punishment at the hands of their teachers or parents. If they admit they follow Jesus, they could lose everything they have worked for. I think it may be hard for some Western Christians to understand how a young believer can suddenly be faced

with such a tough decision. Counting the cost of following Jesus is not just words here; it is a reality that even new believers have to face."

3. The Chinese government wields powerful social controls.

In addition to the vast technology network in China, the Chinese government oversees something called the Social Credit System. Planned for country-wide expansion later in 2020, the system has had several tests in major cities over the past few years. It's designed to give individual citizens a "score" that can move up or down depending on trustworthiness—things like breaking contracts, committing crimes, lying, ignoring rules or other bad behavior can drive your score down.

Doing the "right" thing makes your score go up. People with higher scores have much more freedom. One of the most obvious examples is in travel—"untrustworthy" people are restricted from flying or using high-speed trains. As of April 2019, more than 20 million plane tickets had been canceled under this policy.

It's obvious how this could impact the Christian community. While it currently only penalizes people for spreading religion "illegally," what might happen if the Chinese government decides to deduct social points for attending church, owning a Bible or visiting Christian websites? It could make everyday life extremely for Chinese Christians trying to serve God.

4. The government wants to make sure God's Word and churches fall in line with their interpretation of communism. "Anti-China forces in the West are trying to continue to influence China's social stability and even subvert our country's political power through Christianity, and it is doomed to fail," said Xu Xiaohong head of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China. This is an important quote, because it shows that one of the main fears of the Chinese government is that Christianity will be used to somehow overthrow Chinese culture with the culture of Western countries like the United States. This means that any church that has links with churches in the West can raise suspicion.

It also means that Chinese religious authorities are trying to bring Christianity more in line with official Chinese communism. This reportedly includes a new translation and annotation of the Bible. The Chinese government has also suspended the online sale of Bibles. While Bibles are still available in physical stores, now Chinese Christians no longer have access to God's Word online. It seems to be the only religious text that is not allowed to be sold online.

5. They are making sure no one steps outside of the lines.

The Chinese government is unconcerned with many churches—provided they stay inside the lines the Communist regime has established. But this means that they are the ones who dictate how and where Christians are permitted to worship.

In late 2018, the Chinese government shut down two prominent churches in Beijing and Chengdu, another major city in southwestern China. The churches refused to comply with government regulations and registration; the pastor of Early Rain, one of the churches, has since been sentenced to a nine-year jail term. His church members have been forced into other churches or into truly secret churches out of fear of arrest and harassment. The message of these high-profile closures is clear: Stay in line, or you could be next.

Christians in China are under increasing pressure. And yet, so many of them are standing strong for Jesus. "No one here wants darkness; they all want the Light," says Pastor Jin, a church leader in China who has experienced persecution. "Biblical truth and a relationship with Jesus have become so important that believers now cherish every moment together. Fellowship has become sweet again, like a fountain to thirsty souls.

"The church is growing because of persecution," he continues. "I have hope again and I am satisfied, not because we have arrived—we haven't, there's lots to learn yet—but because we are alive again and growing and equipping the saints for the work of the Kingdom. We still have to be extremely careful every day, and there are dangers, but the sense of peace each day and hope for the future make all the rest seem like stepping stones to glory."