



LANDER, WYOMING *church of Christ*

China and Freedom

I read recently in the Lander Journal of how the Chinese government is clamping down on another Chinese church and would like to give my opinion. Please know I lived in China from 2003-2011 and often worked with underground churches. Please also know I am not saying that what happened in Beijing recently is right. It is not. I just would like to share another angle.

In my experience, the Chinese government generally leaves “illegal” house churches alone as long as they stay clear of politics and remain small and unorganized. The government does not like any large movements as this is competition and can lead to potential social disorder. I was personally involved with 10 different house churches in 3 different cities and all were generally left alone. Did the government perhaps not know they were there? No, that is not possible. Most – perhaps all – housing/apartment complexes have communist party members who specifically look out for signs of “public disorder.” They are often the smiling outgoing ladies who hang out at the gates and seem to be friends with everyone. They quickly notice unfamiliar people – especially foreigners – and because people live over & under each other in apartment blocks, singing is easily heard. The government can easily clamp down on many more groups – but don’t.

Now, please don’t prejudge me when I say this. Please read ahead and understand why I thank God for the Chinese government. They are inadvertently keeping Christianity pure by trying to control it. (Read Romans 13.) Here’s what I mean:

Most Chinese Christians meet in small home groups, so money is used for orphanages and earthquake victims rather than expensive meeting halls. There is no denominational competition because no denominations are allowed. In fact, the more foreigners get involved in local churches, the bigger the possibility of government intervention. As a result, Chinese churches are largely non-denominational. It is wonderful! They show little allegiance to earthly leaders and focus on Jesus as their head. They focus on the Bible – not the latest bestseller or fad by some popular teacher. They have deep relationships with each other because they meet in smaller personal groups as opposed to large assemblies. They have a profound dedication to prayer and China has relatively few psychologists, so the Chinese cast their burdens where they belong: onto Jesus.

Put simply, in many ways they have what many western churches have lost.

In all the 8 years of meeting almost every Sunday with Chinese groups I can remember only a handful of times when we felt directly threatened. Yes, the police could have knocked on the door at any meeting. They could have arrested us – but they didn’t. Again, I am not saying I agree with the recent arrests in Beijing, but the situation in China is not as terrible for Christians as we are sometimes led to believe. I say that from first-hand experience.

While in China I often thought of Jesus teaching while Herod and Caesar were on their thrones. Jesus could easily have overthrown them, but instead He hardly mentioned them. His focus was the kingdom of God. (See Matthew 14:10-14.) That’s where our focus should be too. I believe God is using the Chinese government to keep the region relatively stable, because as a result, the Gospel is spreading quite freely.

- Triston Jacobsohn, 2011