

# Christian Persecution in Iran

*By Frank Zimmerman*

THE other day, someone sent me a forwarded email that was requesting prayers on behalf of a Christian minister who was being held in a jail in Iran. I wrote back:

Do we know what we are getting involved in here? Does anyone know exactly why this Christian pastor was brought to trial? Does anyone know the actual details? Have you heard both sides (which you would need to do in order to judge rightly)? Does anyone know the laws in Iran regarding Christians and the Bible? Have you seen their law books?

Or do we base our knowledge and opinions on possibly biased emails that are sent around telling bits and pieces of the story, and designed to work up our emotions? Do we act rationally, in the fear of God, or are we tossed each way by every wind of doctrine?

According to *Wikipedia*, there are Christian denominations functioning in Iran. But this email leaves the impression that if you even say you are a Christian you are killed. How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

## **Persecution is a Blessing**

Furthermore, what did Jesus actually say about persecution? Did he say that when we are persecuted we should broadcast it publicly to get legal support to change laws or overthrow governments?

### **Matthew 5**

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

From the Christian's side, persecution is a blessing. It shows the character of God in contrast to the character of Satan, and "the blood of the martyrs is seed." Persecution causes real Christianity to grow, and draws honest souls to the truth who might not have known about it otherwise. And it acts as a preventative to keep hypocritical, lukewarm, or world-loving souls from joining the church.

## **The Example of Paul**

The apostle Paul also saw the usefulness of persecution when he said:

### **2 Corinthians 11**

<sup>23</sup> Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

<sup>24</sup> Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

<sup>25</sup> Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

<sup>30</sup> If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my infirmities.

You never find these early Christians lobbying with governments and legal entities to have the laws changed regarding persecution against Christians. Never once do you find Jesus, Paul, or the early Christians complaining about how their human rights were being abused, and seeking the help of lawyers to defend those rights. This is not the way Christianity is established. You cannot establish righteousness by governmental law, because human laws only change outward behavior. The rebellion of the heart cannot be removed by force and punishment.

## **Be Not Unequally Yoked**

The other difficulty with this appeal is that we all know there is intense political conflict between many of the Muslim nations and the western nations. There have been open wrongs committed on both sides, but no real repentance. By putting our support on one of these sides, we become responsible for their actions. Whatever

consequences come upon them by the violation of natural and moral laws, we will partake of. What does the Bible say about this union?

## **2 Corinthians 6**

<sup>14</sup> Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness?

## **1 John 2**

<sup>15</sup> Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

<sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

What is driving the conflict in the middle east? Lust for land, lust for power, lust for oil resources, lust for control of others. We need to be entirely separate from these lusts. Any attempt to solve these problems through military violence will only plunge the world into deeper troubles. It would not take much now to tip the scale of the whole economic, political and environmental forces in the world and bring them into confusion and disaster. Then we all will suffer greatly, and the spread of the gospel will be even further hindered.

## **What did Jesus say?**

### **John 18**

<sup>36</sup> My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight...

*No war waged in this world today is ever  
a “Christian” war,  
nor does it establish the kingdom of Christ.  
Christ’s servants do not fight in such wars.*

Now these Christians who are being persecuted in the world today: how many of them are mixed up in political matters? Per-

haps we cannot know, but this important statistic is not being mentioned. It is little wonder that a professed Christian would suffer persecution if he is teaching disobedience and insurrection against the government of the country he is in. Such countries become very suspicious of Christians when those who profess to be so are teaching treason against the government.

Therefore we must not allow our sympathies to be stirred up against supposed persecution against Christians in far-away nations, without a full knowledge of the facts. We need to be intelligent about what we are praying for, and make sure that what we are asking for is according to God's promises.

Also consider,

### **How is Christ's Kingdom Spread?**

#### **Matthew 5**

<sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

“Good works.” These are the weapons. If we think these are not powerful enough to affect even Muslims, then perhaps our good works are not yet good enough, and we need to reach the hand of faith even higher.

Jesus broke down the walls of prejudice between Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Samaritans, Jews and Romans. He was able to reach them all because his gospel appealed to the deepest needs of the human heart. The power of God can reach where no human law can ever extend. This is where we need to concentrate our effort.

### **Same Old Prejudice**

The anti-Muslim material that goes around in email reminds me of the anti-Samaritan views of Jesus' time. The Jews made void the law of God which was against hate, bigotry, pride, in order to accommodate their anti-Samaritan prejudice.

And the same spirit is still here today, growing and thriving under the name of Christianity, or patriotism.

### **The Real Enemy**

But as always, sin is the enemy, not some other religion or political party.

But who wants to think about sin? Then we'd have to deal with all the abuses that our nations and people participate in, all the extravagances, the wasting of resources, the enslaving of poorer nations for profit, the moral degradation that our movies and music cause throughout the world, etc. We might even have to sell our flat screen TV's and give the money to those poorer Muslim countries who could really use it much more than we. Do you think they would still hate us if we actually lived our faith?

But this is a "hard saying." Therefore we must find a distraction—someone else to blame for the consequences of our sins. Thus we show that we have learned nothing at all since *Genesis 3*, and continue to make fig leaves and excuses to hide our own nakedness.