

Canadian Pastor Shares Gospel With Police After Arrest for COVID Violation

Pastor Tim Stephens of Fairview Baptist Church in Calgary, Alberta is the second pastor this month to be arrested for holding church services in violation of COVID-19 orders, and the third this year who have made headlines for standing up for their right to worship.

Unlike Pastors Artur Pawlowski and James Coates, whose harsh language blanketed their arrests, Stephens is a “quiet, reserved man who is simply leading his congregation in worship,” according to Adam Soos of Rebel News. “He didn’t make this a large political deal.”

Calgary police arrested Stephens outside of his church Sunday, May 16, declining to tell the gathered news agencies the charges under which Stephens was being taken. Police later told CBC News that Stephens’ services violated the “Court of Queen’s Bench Order that requires organizers of events to comply with public health restrictions,” and “issued a closure order for the church on Sunday.” Current restrictions only allow churches to gather with up to 15 congregants wearing masks and socially distanced.

“Restricting the church to 15 people—which essentially restricts the church from gathering—is against the will of Christ and against the conscience of many who desire to worship the Lord of glory according to His Word,” Stephens wrote in a blog post published in early May. Knowing his arrest was a possibility, Stephens obeyed the will of Christ and held his church service anyway.

He tweeted ahead of the service that would eventually cause his arrest, “I believe a clear conscience is a more desirable

than staying clear of unpleasant consequences.”

As I head into another weekend facing threats of arrest for leading my church to gather in worship...

I believe a clear conscience is a more desirable than staying clear of unpleasant consequences.

– Tim Stephens (@tim__stephens) May 14, 2021

Tim Stephens’ wife, Raquel, shared portions of a letter her husband sent his family following his arrest. In it, he asked for prayers and told his family of the good that was already coming out of this dire situation.

“He was able to share the gospel with the officers that drove him away!” she writes.

@tim__stephens

– Raquel Stephens (@RaquelAStephens) May 17, 2021

The pastor acknowledged the seriousness of COVID-19 but wrote in his blog post that ultimately, the “church is not beholden to earthly rulers to regulate its worship, gatherings, ministries or mission.”

Stephens addressed frequent concerns, such as personal agendas influencing his decision to keep the church open or the claim that meeting for services prolongs the spread of COVID.

These, he refuted, are concerns not based on Scriptural truth. Nor are they applicable to his congregation, Stephens said. “By God’s grace, our church has not had a single transmission of COVID19 in a year of gathering together weekly,” he wrote. “We have encouraged those who are sick to stay home and for everyone to be proactive with their health to combat sicknesses we will inevitably encounter.”

Furthermore, Stephens believes “the cure should not be worse than the disease,” citing the emotional turmoil much of the world has endured in the last year, resulting in mental health issues, increased suicide rates and an increase in non-COVID related diseases.

He concluded, “During these times the world needs more of the church, not less of it. In a time of fear, we need hope, not isolation. In a time of disease, we need to promote Christ, the great physician. There are gospel opportunities before us and the church must rise up and be bold for the Lord Jesus.”
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