

In Wake of Pricey Prisoner Exchange, Sgt. Bergdahl's Pastor Speaks Up

In the midst of the media firestorm over U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's pricey release, one Christian is rising up to defend him—his pastor.

Phil Proctor is the pastor of Sterling Presbyterian Church in Sterling, Virginia, and was an interim pastor at the Bergdahls' church in Boise. When he left the U.S. to be a missionary, he maintained in close contact with the family.

In a recent interview with Christianity Today, Proctor sought to set the record straight on the disgraced sergeant accused of deserting.

"If Bowe was a deserter, I'll be the first to send him a care package in prison," Proctor told CT's Sheryl Blunt.

When Bergdahl was released, Proctor says he and the family "just rejoiced together in God's mercies. We talked about the media response and their intention of keeping quiet. We prayed together thanking God for his mercies to Bowe and asking for continued protection and healing."

"The Bergdahls are just the flavor of the week, and next week it's going to be a different scandal. That's politics. But these are brothers and sisters in Christ," he said, cautioning Christians not to turn their backs on the believing family.

When asked if he thought Bergdahl was a deserter, he answers that he simply doesn't know. If the allegations were true, he argued, it is the authorities' job to sort out the details.

"Right now, we're watching a lynch mob, and Christians are getting engaged in the lynching. In any other situation, we'd

be hugging the parents and weeping with them.”

Proctor describes Bergdahl’s spirituality as under development, trying to discern if it was his own or his parents’. The pastor noted the sergeant’s maturity, saying, “He wasn’t rebellious at all.” He noted that he had not ever made a profession of faith in Christ.

The pastor also refuted the false claim that the sergeant’s father, Bob Bergdahl, had converted to Islam after he used the word “salam,” the Arabic cognate of *shalom*.