

Why We Can Never Stop Persecution

As North Korea dominates the news cycle, it's topping yet another headline; this time, the country with the worst persecution for Christians, according to Open Doors USA.

The rise of radical-isms, including radical Hinduism and nationalism, placed several Asian countries on the list.

After North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq, Yemen and Iran round out the top 10.

"Afghanistan and North Korea nearly tied," said Open Doors USA President David Curry. "Never before have the top two countries been so close in incidents. Both countries are extreme in intolerance and outright persecution of Christians in every area Open Doors monitors. Afghanistan now meets the same level of persecution as North Korea in five out of the six areas. This is a tragedy considering the efforts being made by the international community to help rebuild Afghanistan are failing to ensure freedom of religion.

"Reports of violence and human rights atrocities from North Korea are pervasive, while the situation faced by Christians in Afghanistan may be underestimated. It is hard for Westerners to imagine a second country could nearly meet the levels of persecution seen in North Korea, but Afghanistan has reached that level this year."

More than 215 million Christians worldwide face high levels of persecution for their faith; nearly one of every 12 Christians in the world today lives in an area, or in a culture, in which Christianity is illegal, forbidden or punished, according to a release.

To address the growing persecution worldwide, Charisma News spoke with Curry about what's really happening all around us, the end times and American persecution.

How has persecution against Christians increased in recent years?

The spread of extremist Islamic ideology, which seeks to impose sharia law on governments and cultures, has fueled the incredible rise of persecution of Christians. In addition, a rise in the disquiet of nationalism, mixed with extremist Hinduism and Buddhism, is fueling persecution in India, Nepal and Myanmar.

How does this fit into biblical prophecy?

Open Doors doesn't seek to end persecution, but to stand with persecuted believers and to send a prophetic wake up to the western church. The only way to stop persecution is to stop talking about Jesus—and we cannot stop doing that. In prophecy, Christians will be opposed. That is biblical. However, it is also through Scripture that we pray and stand with those imprisoned and persecuted for the name of Jesus.

How does the news cycle play a role, like with North Korea or even (Trump) announcing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel?

Right now, it dominates. If it were not for news stories about North Korea, ISIS and the like, most Christians would not know anything about persecution, because churches aren't talking about it. Awareness of the issue is woefully insufficient; it is much broader and deeper than what the news covers.

What do American believers not realize about persecution?

American believers have not yet awakened to how pervasive persecution is across the world. America and the West are the only regions where people are largely free to choose their faith and read and talk about Jesus without fear of some sort of reprisal.

Where does this happen the most (at church on Sunday mornings, daily on the street, or elsewhere)?

Islamic cultures, where conversions cause expulsion from family and community, are a driving force of violence and the squeeze of pressure. However, there are many other factors. Churches are at risk all over the world, but in the toughest places there are no churches, and public violence is not measurable; nevertheless, it is intense.

How does the rise of radical Islam play a role?

Islamic extremism is the greatest factor influencing countries on the World Watch List. ISIS facing defeat in Syria and Iraq changes nothing. Islam must deal with the theology that is instigating this dangerous element.

What can we do to prevent/stop this?

Governments play a role in curbing extremism and protecting religious minorities. But the church worldwide, not just in America, also plays a role. We have largely withdrawn from the Middle East in missions for fear or lack of understanding. Loving engagement, even basic hospitality, toward Islamic neighbors would be a great first step for most of us. We also must encourage believers in the Middle East.

When can we expect things to turn around?

The main drivers of persecution are in place and not being addressed, so a turnaround is not likely in the short term. Having said that, I am encouraged. Jesus is alive and well in every difficult region of the world—even North Korea.

How has the Trump administration affected persecution worldwide?

We have worked across the aisle in D.C. for years to make sure both parties understand the importance of support religious liberty for Christians and other minorities. This

administration has done more to help Christians than any I'm aware of. However, the perception of nationalism being acceptable has emboldened India, Nepal, Myanmar and others who use nationalist agendas to push out or punish Christian faith. Still, I give the administration credit for caring on a deep level and for the team they have assembled to help—particularly the vice president, who is a champion for persecuted believers.

How does the persecution in the United States compare internationally?

It doesn't. We've got it easy. But you can see the strategies of radical secularism: no more tax benefits and lawsuits against churches, nonprofits and Christian business people—they will try to starve the support for Christian charity.

The Open Doors World Watch List is the only comprehensive, annual survey of the state of religious liberty for Christians around the world. From Nov. 1, 2016, to Oct. 31, 2017, researchers measured the degree of freedom a Christian has to live out his or her faith in five spheres of life—private, family, community, national and church, plus a sixth category measuring the degree of violence. Points are given for each incident of persecution, and the total points provide the ranking for each country. For more information on the methodology of the Open Doors World Watch List, please visit .