

Lessons from the Underground Church in China



Early Rain Covenant Church in China began with several small groups in 2006, and became an independent church with 63 members in 2008. Wang Yi was installed as pastor in 2011. The church now has 500 members / attendees from all ages and all walks of life, and has planted six other churches.

In 2018, the Chinese government began implementing strict regulations censoring Christian worship.



Since then, Early Rain experienced significant and persistent ongoing persecution. More than 200 church members have been arrested. The church members have had property seized and destroyed, and faced repeated eviction from their homes or deportation to distant provinces. In 2019, Pastor Wang Yi was secretly tried – and was sentenced to 9 years of criminal detention and fined 50,000 RMB. This is the longest sentence given to a house church pastor in a decade.

Foreseeing this possibility, Pastor Wang Yi wrote a declaration to be published by his church should he be detained for more than 48 hours. In it he explains the meaning and necessity of faithful disobedience, how it is distinct from political activism or civil disobedience, and how Christians should carry it out.

The following are excerpts from Pastor Wang Yi's "**Declaration of Faithful Disobedience**"

On the basis of the teachings of the Bible and the mission of the gospel, I respect the authorities God has established in China. For God deposes kings and raises up kings. This is why I submit to the historical and institutional arrangements of God in China.

For this reason, I accept and respect the fact that this Communist regime has been allowed by God to rule temporarily. As the Lord's servant John Calvin said, wicked rulers are the judgment of God on a wicked people, the goal being to urge God's people to repent and turn again toward Him. For this reason, I am joyfully willing to submit myself to their enforcement of the law as though submitting to the discipline and training of the Lord. At the same time, I believe that this Communist regime's persecution against the church is a greatly wicked, unlawful action.

As a pastor of a Christian church, I must denounce this wickedness openly and severely. The calling that I have received requires me to use non-violent methods to disobey those human laws that disobey the Bible and God. My Savior Christ also requires me to joyfully bear all costs for disobeying wicked laws.

But this does not mean that my personal disobedience and the disobedience of the church is in any sense "fighting for rights" or political activism in the form of civil disobedience, because I do not have the intention of changing any institutions or laws of China. As a pastor, the only thing I care about is the disruption of man's sinful nature by this faithful disobedience and the testimony it bears for the cross of Christ.

As a pastor, my disobedience is one part of the gospel commission. Christ's great commission requires of us great disobedience. The goal of disobedience is not to change the world but to testify about another world.

If God decides to use the persecution of this Communist regime against the church to help more Chinese people to despair of their futures, to lead them through a wilderness of spiritual disillusionment and through this to make them know Jesus, if through this he continues disciplining and building up his church, then I am joyfully willing to submit to God's plans, for his plans are always benevolent and good.

If this regime is one day overthrown by God, it will be for no other reason than God's righteous punishment and revenge for this evil. For on earth, there has only ever been a thousand-year church. There has never been a thousand-year government. There is only eternal faith. There is no eternal power.

Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ. When I think of this, the Lord fills me with a natural compassion and grief toward those who are attempting to and actively imprisoning me. Pray that the Lord would use me, that he would grant me patience and wisdom, that I might take the gospel to them.

Separate me from my wife and children, ruin my reputation, destroy my life and my family – the authorities are capable of doing all of these things. However, no one in this world can force me to renounce my faith; no one can make me change my life; no one can raise me from the dead.

And so, respectable officers, stop committing evil. This is not for my benefit but rather for yours and your children's. I plead earnestly with you to stay your hands, for why should you be willing to pay the price of eternal damnation in hell for the sake of a lowly sinner such as I?

Jesus is the Christ, son of the eternal, living God. He died for sinners and rose to life for us. He is my king and the king of the whole earth yesterday, today, and forever. I am his servant, and I am imprisoned because of this. I will resist in meekness those who resist God, and I will joyfully violate all laws that violate God's laws.

Pastor Wang Yi also wrote an Appendix explaining **“What Constitutes Faithful Disobedience”**

I firmly believe that the Bible has not given any branch of any government the authority to run the church or to interfere with the faith of Christians. Therefore, the Bible demands that I, through peaceable means, in meek resistance and active forbearance, filled with joy, resist all administrative policies and legal measures that oppress the church and interfere with the faith of Christians. ... In modern authoritarian regimes that persecute the church and oppose the gospel, spiritual disobedience is an inevitable part of the gospel movement. I firmly believe that spiritual disobedience is an act of the last times; it is a witness to God's eternal kingdom in the temporal kingdom of sin and evil. Disobedient Christians follow the example of the crucified Christ by walking the path of the cross. Peaceful disobedience is the way in which we love the world as well as the way in which we avoid becoming part of the world.

I firmly believe that in carrying out spiritual disobedience, the Bible demands me to rely on the grace and resurrection power of Christ, that I must respect and not overstep two boundaries.

The first boundary is that of the heart. Love toward the soul, and not hatred toward the body, is the motivation of spiritual disobedience. Transformation of the soul, and not the changing of circumstances, is the aim of spiritual disobedience.

At any time, if external oppression and violence rob me of inner peace and endurance, so that my heart begins to breed hatred and bitterness toward those who persecute the church and abuse Christians, then spiritual disobedience fails at that point.

The second boundary is that of behavior. The gospel demands that disobedience of faith must be non-violent. The mystery of the gospel lies in actively suffering, even being willing to endure unrighteous punishment, as a substitute for physical resistance.

Peaceful disobedience is the result of love and forgiveness. The cross means being willing to suffer when one does not have to suffer. For Christ had limitless ability to fight back, yet he endured all of the humility and hurt. The way that Christ resisted the world that resisted him was by extending an olive branch of peace on the cross to the world that crucified him.

I firmly believe that Christ has called me to carry out this faithful disobedience through a life of service, under this regime that opposes the gospel and persecutes the church. This is the means by which I preach the gospel, and it is the mystery of the gospel which I preach.

The above information was obtained from ChinaPartnership.org – where you learn more about Early Rain Covenant Church (and pray for or financially support them). To view sermons from Pastor Wang Yi, visit the church Youtube channel [Wang Yi Sermon Clips](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWangYiSermonClips)



I once told a few brothers and sisters, that in my early Christian years, every time I entered the Police station, I was afraid. But I said I learned something that I wanted to share with them. I want to share it with all of you, too.

When I'm being interrogated at the Police station, I put myself in a spiritually safe situation.

What do I mean by a spiritually safe situation? I mean I put myself in a physically unsafe situation.

What I mean is that when I'm in the Police station, for the sake of safety, I say everything upfront.

I immediately arrive at the point of no retreat. Unless you beat me, unless you arrest me, we have nothing more to talk about. Do you understand what I mean? If I discuss things with them little by little, if I prolong our conversation, I will be influenced by them. I will feel spiritually unsafe. They will get to my head through some roundabout ways. Then my spirit will weaken, and many of their words and actions will affect me. I don't want to be in this kind of spiritual danger.

So in the very beginning, I clearly and directly address the point of conflict, in the starkest possible terms, so that there is nothing more to discuss. This is what I have learned to do. Then there are no more questions left for them to ask me. All they can do is beat me or arrest me.

me with a crime and arrest me, I have nothing more to say. I don't dispute the Communist Party's rule over this country. But communism is evil. This is what I believe. Do what you want to me."

As soon as I say this, there is not turning back. I've discovered that this puts you in more physical danger, but it also comes with a great benefit. It increases your spiritual safety. So this is what I do every time. When I do this, I know that I'm spiritually safe.

Jesus also did this. Jesus often, through one word, forced all of Israel, all of the Sanhedrin, all of the Pharisees, into a position where they had to kill him. Either they had to believe in Him, or they had to kill him. As C. S. Lewis says, "You must either fall at His feet and call Him Lord, or you must kill Him. Because there is no middle ground, no safe zone."

So let me encourage you all, brothers and sisters, when you're facing persecution, when you're facing pressure because of your faith, don't give yourself too much wiggle room. Articulate the most controversial point as early as possible, and then with Esther, say "If I die, I die". It is often those who say "If I die, I die" who live in the end.