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Persecution and Violence Can't Stop God's Work in California's Prisons

Peter Ditzel

Since 2000, Word of His Grace Ministries has had an ongoing relationship with the pastor of the Sovereign Grace Bible Church of the "C" yard in Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, California. The pastor is himself an inmate, and I will withhold his name. What makes this pastor and the work God is doing through him extraordinary is the phenomenal growth it has experienced as it has spread throughout the California prison system. Not only that, but it has experienced this growth despite severe persecution, usually over the doctrines of grace. At times, the pastor has even been the victim of violence from other prisoners, including those who claim to be Christians and are members of other churches.

Below are excerpts from the pastor's latest letter, in which he tells of being stabbed and of God's blessings on the Sovereign Grace Bible Church. Please remember this dear brother and his work in your prayers.

I'm so sorry for my delay in writing to you.... Yes, I was stabbed.... I went out for surgery on March 26, April 20, and May 5. I was in really bad shape, but I have recovered. They had to put a stent in my renal tube in my right and left kidney due to collapsed kidneys.

...Now I have been placed in protective custody on D yard. I have a new address, but the great thing is, God's grace has empowered me to start a new church on this yard. We are already growing, and the Lord has given me new fruit on this yard. Furthermore, my fruit is remaining as the Sovereign Grace Bible Church is flourishing on C yard as a deacon...is now pastoring the church.... Please pray for me as I am starting all over again. I have one more surgery to undergo, but God will bring his grace to me.... We must work together to build this church. I have such a fire inside me and death does not scare me. God is the One I fear. I love much because I have been forgiven much.

God used you to put me on fire for the grace of God, so let's do this. Because of the grace of God in you, we have now grown from C yard to over 1,000 men who are in prison and out on parole and off parole. We have 14 churches already, and you have been the reason for this by God's Spirit. I have been willing to sacrifice my life for Jesus Christ and His church, so let's take a deep breath and move forward.

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Now to what has been started from C yard Sovereign Grace Bible Church. [He then lists the churches, their pastors, and the prisons. I will simply list the prisons here: Solano State Prison, California Men's Colony West Yard, Pleasant Valley State Prison C yard, Pleasant Valley State Prison E yard, Pleasant Valley State Prison D yard, Corcoran State Prison (II), Richard J. Donovan State Prison in San Diego, Avenal State Prison, Old Corcoran State Prison (I) 4 yard, Calipatria State Prison, Tehachapi State Prison (California Correctional Institution) yard 3, Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, San Quentin State Prison, "the other San Quentin State Prison."] Now we have a new church starting at Folsom State Prison.... All of these men were deacons of the Sovereign Grace Bible Church C yard and were trained to go out and build new churches in prison.

...Enclosed you will find one of our support letters from one of our former deacons who served in our church while in prison. He was saved in our church, obtained his GED through our church literacy program through TIGER ministry of the SGBC [Sovereign Grace Bible Church]. He then went out to college and is now a missionary. I hope you are encouraged by all of your work. This church has the marks of blood and extreme persecution for its stand upon the Word of God and the grace it teaches for salvation.

I love you. I cannot quit! As long as my heart beats, I will preach the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.