

# Planting the Underground Church - Part 1

by Eric Foley

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being fully Christian in the midst of the sexual revolution and persecution, and provides practical recommendations for the Korean church to prepare for restrictions and challenges.*

**Duration:** 58:31

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:13-16, Acts 5:29, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 2:11

**Topics:** "Cultural Engagement", "Church Renewal"

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## Description

This sermon addresses the challenges posed by the sexual revolution to the church, emphasizing the need to be fully Christian amidst these unique challenges. It explores the broader implications of the sexual revolution beyond homosexuality, highlighting the importance of understanding and responding to self-creation and societal changes. The sermon advocates for churches to consider going underground not to hide, but to unplug from societal systems that may restrict their ability to fulfill their God-given functions.

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## Transcript

What we're going to be talking about tonight is that the best way to respond to the sexual revolution is not to respond to the sexual revolution, but instead to learn how to be fully Christian even in the midst of all of the unique challenges that the sexual revolution is bringing to the church. So that's what we're going to be talking about tonight in the second seminar, which is called planting the underground church. And so hopefully you should have received a copy of the book, *Planting the Underground Church*.

I also should mention everybody, if I could, ask you to make sure I need to do that myself. Make sure your cell phone ringer is turned off. Many Korean Christians and pastors think of homosexuality as just a growing issue of sin in society.

One that needs to be dealt with by activists, organizations, specialized ministries. But as we explained at our first training event, which was our training event in February, the gay rights movement is actually a part of a much larger revolution that we call the sexual revolution. And so what we talked about in February is that we said this actually presents a bigger challenge to the Korean church here in South Korea than the communist revolution did to the church in North Korea.

So homosexuality is really only a part of this much wider issue related to what we call self-creation, the tendency we have to want to create our own bodies, create our own sexuality, create our own morality. So I don't know if you saw in the news this morning, a report about the amount of pornography that's on the smartphones even of third grade children. And another news report today talked about how in two years, what we think of as the traditional family, mother, father, child, that will no longer be the most common kind of family in Korea.

So these are huge issues in Korean society. And quite frankly, our experience has been that overall the South Korean church is actually quite asleep when it comes to these issues of the sexual revolution. The South Korean church deals with each of these issues as kind of independent or separate issues, but they don't yet see the full connection in many ways.

And yet all of these issues are connected together. And as early as 80 years ago, the enemies of the church worldwide came to this conclusion. This is a quote from the French Surrealist Movement.

They said only sex, not socialism, can destroy Christianity. They said only sex, not socialism, can destroy Christianity. And so that's why we've published these two books, and we have a third on the way about the sexual revolution.

That's why we're doing these training events. Tonight we will not be covering the material we covered in our first training event. That was from the book we released in January called Preparing for the Underground Church.

And this talks in detail about the theological, historical, social backgrounds of this issue of the sexual revolution. And this talks in detail about the theological, historical, social backgrounds of this issue of the sexual revolution. So that book is available through our office.

It's actually available through Amazon.com also. It's called Preparing for the Underground Church. And the video from the training event, the whole training event, is actually online on our website under our videos.

But tonight the content is completely different. So some of those questions about the origin of the sexual revolution, the meaning of the sexual revolution, we're going to assume your background in that. And we're going to be talking tonight from the second book, which is Planting the Underground Church.

And it consists of 12 detailed recommendations for Korean churches. We believe these 12 recommendations to be essential for the Korean church. In order to be able to address these growing issues of the sexual revolution.

And so in the book what you'll see is that with each of these points, there's two sets of recommendations we give. One for pastors of existing churches. And a second set for planting new churches in light of these issues of the sexual revolution.

Now I'm convinced that anyone who reads this book will come to the conclusion that we are absolutely crazy. And the reason why I say that, perhaps you feel this way, I know that you're here because of your strong interest in the sexual revolution. And I was telling our staff tonight before the event, I said when Noah was building the ark, it was not an answer to any question that anyone was asking.

So only when it starts raining does the ark make any sense. Now we're certainly not Noah. But what we're suggesting here is as strange as building an ark.

But what I want to emphasize about each of these 12 points is that none of them are original, none of them are new. These 12 points are drawn from the experiences of persecuted Christians and underground churches around the world. So what we did is we looked at places where the church had been established and then began to face restriction or even persecution.

We asked the question, where were the places that the church was able to survive? And how was it able to survive? And that's what forms these 12 recommendations. So truly there's nothing new here. In other words, we didn't create anything new.

We didn't create anything new. In fact, Dr. Foley and I, we were watching a movie last night about Polycarp, one of the early church martyrs. And what was so interesting was you could see in the movie each of these 12 principles at work.

And so these 12 principles may sound new to us. They may sound strange to us. But they are principles that are drawn from 2,000 years of church history.

And I believe that these 12 principles can help us to become church in an even deeper way. I always encourage Korean churches, I say, don't be afraid of the sexual revolution. Don't be worried about the changes that we're facing.

God permits all of these things for our good. There are ways we need to grow and change as a Korean church. And so I think we can greet this difficult situation we're in.

And with joy. Now one of the words that we'll use again and again tonight, certainly the title of the book, is underground church. And I want to talk about that term both at the beginning and then as we go through the 12 principles.

Because really what we're doing is we're advocating for churches, established churches and new churches to go underground. But to go underground does not mean to go in hiding. In countries where Christians are restricted or persecuted, the church is typically not in hiding.

What it means for the church to be underground is that the church has unplugged itself from the systems that exist in that society or culture for being an organization. So for example, when we think about how a church would start in Korean society typically, it would go through a series of steps along the way it would do things like open up a bank account. It would somehow establish itself legally.

Often in Korea that's done by associating or affiliating with a denomination. A church would rent a building. A pastor would print business cards.

The business cards would have the name of the church, the address of the church, the service times of the church. And all of these things seem very basic to us. They seem like that is how you would do church.

But each of the things that I just mentioned to you require us to plug in to the existing systems in a society or culture. And it is through plugging in to the systems in a culture that churches begin to be controlled, restricted, tracked, in extreme cases shut down. Watched, monitored.

Not only in formal ways by the government, but also informally through the culture, even through social media. And so when we talk about going underground, we are talking about doing church in a way that doesn't rely on any of those systems. On one hand, that's a real challenge to our imagination.

It's hard for us to think about how we could do church like that. How could we do church if we couldn't rent a building? Or if we couldn't set up a bank account? Or if we didn't have service times that were listed? How would anybody know about us? How would anybody show up? But these are the things that we take seriously when we think about going underground in a situation where a church faces restrictions in a society. And so that is our subject tonight.

And our teachers are not Dr. Foley and me. Our teachers are really underground Christians from around the world. From countries where Christians are already deeply persecuted.

But even in countries like the United States and countries in Europe, where Christians are already facing increasing restrictions on the full practice of their faith. So what we're going to do in our seminar tonight is I'm going to guide you through the 12 recommendations in the book. It will almost be like a book club where you haven't read the book yet.

Because what I want to do is to put it in context for you. I want to draw your attention to specific passages of the book that I want to highlight for you. And ultimately the goal tonight is to start a conversation.

We'll stay here after the seminar to answer any questions. And if we have time actually at the end of the seminar, of course we'll answer questions. But mainly tonight, again, what we want to do is to begin to ask the questions.

We want to begin to build a network of people who are thinking in this way. Especially for pastors and church leaders. We want to say that this issue is not an issue for activists.

This is not an issue for anti-homosexual organizations. The focus that we need to have is what does it mean to be fully Christian in this hour? And so in that first book, *Preparing the Underground Church*, we talked about why it's going to be a difficult hour. And now we're going to talk about how we respond to this hour.

And we're going to start right in with the recommendations that we make in the book. And we're going to start with the first recommendation. Legal incorporation puts the church in bondage.

So instead, be aliens. And temporary residents. On the one hand, this is simply a quote from scripture.

In fact, there are many quotes in scripture that fit this kind of understanding that our society is not our home. The early Christians even thought of themselves as a different race. So we are citizens of a coming kingdom.

And so what that means is that when we talk about being church, we actually want to be a little bit cautious when we use the term Korean church. We are not a church of Korea. We are a church whose foundations are in the world to come.

And so as a result of that, we ought to be cautious anytime that we do things that bind us to this present world or this present society. And so in this first recommendation, we use the words legal incorporation to refer to that whole set of issues that I just described to you about financial systems. And the

recommendation that we make is essentially this.

Christian organizations need to take action now meaning churches, churches, NGOs, anyone in this Christian world need to take action now so that we can continue to operate even in the event that our access to all of the world's systems is shut down. You know that increasingly the world financial system is being used to carry out the will of various governments around the world. So you may not have experienced that yet in the context of say for example a local church.

But for us at Voice of the Martyrs we face that literally every week. If the name of your organization is Voice of the Martyrs that means it's quite likely that if someone tries to send you money through the international financial system meaning international wire transfer that that money will be frozen. If it is that you are doing mission work in a country that is considered to be a restricted country an enemy of the country where you live you will find that it is already almost impossible to transfer money to the international financial system.

So trying to transfer money of course to North Korea, to Iran this has been difficult for some time. But now even today if you're doing projects that relate to those countries even though you're not transferring money into those countries even if you're doing mission work that relates to those countries you will almost certainly be facing restrictions already. If someone were to transfer money to us at Voice of the Martyrs and send it to the international financial system and it said for North Korean balloons our North Korean balloon ministry that money is almost certainly almost in every case.

So that's already a reality and in Korea we already have laws that exist that make it so that the Korean government has access to has the ability to address the work of missionaries in countries that it considers to be dangerous. What people are less aware of is that those issues of the financial system aren't just related to international financial transfers but they already relate to domestic financial transfers. So much of the information that we assume is confidential simply is not.

So our text messages our KakaoTalk messages all of those things are things that are available anytime that the government feels that it has a reason to inspect them. And so it's not only finances even things like for example the buildings that we are in provide a means of control and restriction on the part of the government. This is a very common form of restriction that happens in countries that are even known to be free.

So for example to say that buildings in a given area are subject to human rights legislation meaning that human rights cannot be violated in buildings that are licensed in a certain area provides a means of control on the message that we can share in the buildings that we occupy. So we know already there are restrictions on for example evangelism in public areas but what we're seeing already in countries in Europe and the United States is the use of existing codes as a means of control or restriction on what the church can practice or preach. And so our recommendation both for existing churches and people starting new churches is to make sure that in your organizational life that you are not dependent upon these systems in order to allow you to continue to function.

So for example if your access to your bank account was cut off tomorrow which is very possible would you be able to continue to operate as an organization? And if so for how long? Would you be able to pay the rent? Would you be able to pay your staff? Would you be able to carry out your ministry? And especially in Korea here I really want to encourage you to ask these questions now literally at this moment because we are looking at almost certainty of a significant change in the political administration in the next election.

And so now is the time to be able to make these kind of moves before restrictions are put in place So you say what does an underground organization look like? I mean does it operate in a basement or what is that? Well you are in an underground organization. Sort of in a basement I guess you could say.

But what makes us underground is that all of the things that I just listed for you are realities that we already face everyday. And so if it is that we were to lose our NGO status which we think is entirely possible I mean we work in issues related to Muslims, Buddhists North Korea Homosexuality I mean if anybody is going to be restricted it will be us. But we have already made those moves so that financially we can continue to operate without interruption.

If Dr. Foley and I are detained if we are kicked out of the country there is already a plan in place in our organization about how to plan and who is going to operate. All of our ministries would continue to function without interruption. And so I encourage you to read that first chapter carefully whether you are an existing church or planting a new church.

I think it is probably the most important chapter in the book. The thing you hear when you talk to Christians who are persecuted in other countries they always say the same thing. I wish I had taken these steps sooner.

And people always say why would I do that now? And always the issue is you need to do it before you need to do it. And so in the first chapter you will see more detailed recommendations about this subject. But each of these recommendations builds on top of each other so let's continue on to the second one.

The second principle is this. Don't flee, resist or accommodate persecution. Instead be fully Christian in the midst of it.

In the midst of it during that time. In that chapter we are quoting from a very interesting study that was done if you want to get to the page it is beginning of page 56. We are studying the work of Professor Peter Kuzmich at Gordon Conwell Seminary.

And he says that any time that restrictions begin to happen in a given society restrictions on the church there are typically three ways that people respond. All of them are bad. And by the way this applies not only to the level of churches facing restriction in a country but it's also true to Christians in a workplace.

And so people for example who work for the city of Seoul or in the school systems in the city of Seoul I really want to encourage you to pay close attention because we are facing more and more laws all the time that will provide real challenge to Christians for the exercise. But what Kuzmich found in his study he said that typically what Christians do when they face some kind of restriction the most common response to run away to move to change jobs change where your church is located and of course the problem with that is that is exactly the place where we need to be. We need to be salt and light in such places.

The second mistake that Christians make and it sounds strange to say this is a mistake but it is. Christians respond to restrictions by resisting. What I mean by that is that they form activist organizations to try to go to court to stand up for their rights and try to win the battle in the media and the reason this is such a mistake we can see already has happened in the US and in Europe with regard to the sexual revolution.

This is exactly how Christians in America and Europe responded to the sexual revolution. Fighting the battle in the media fighting the battle in the courts going out to protest and in less than 10 years things changed to where 10 years ago most American and European Christians didn't even know anyone who

was gay and now today gay marriage is the law in most countries but that's not even the main issue.

The main issue is that more than 50% of Christians now support gay marriage so this is why we say that the best way to respond to the sexual revolution is not to respond to the sexual revolution but instead to be fully Christian in the midst of that revolution In other words the best protest against gay marriage is a truly fully Christian marriage The best protest against gay marriage is a truly fully Christian marriage So sometimes people will say oh so you're saying we should just give up and let all these changes happen I'm saying no the best way to prevent changes from happening is to be fully Christian You know there is an interesting truth about the way that people are trained to detect counterfeit money They're trained not by looking at and studying counterfeit money They're

trained by studying real money because if you study real money carefully for a long time counterfeit money becomes very obvious So the biggest challenge that the Korean church faces in regards to for example gay marriage is not a legal battle It is the reality that the Korean church still struggles with helping people in the church to have fully Christian marriages Most Christian marriages today when you talk to the young people that are involved they enter into marriage on the basis of self-fulfillment Because we like the other person They meet our needs They complete me Interestingly none of those form the basis of Christian marriage In many cases your spouse will be your enemy related to those things like meeting your needs and completing you and so forth In Christian marriage the

husband and wife are called to be sacramentally the presence of Christ and the church to one another So Christian marriage is martyrdom and that doesn't mean misery It means witness to the relationship between Christ and the church not only in words but in action And so until we have truly Christian marriages in our churches as the standard for young people marrying today then that's really our biggest problem Because gay marriage is simply based on the idea of self-fulfillment and so if marriage for Christians is based on self-fulfillment it doesn't matter how much you protest in public or how much you protest in the courts Gay marriage will simply become the reality of life in Korea So we have to do something other than simply resist But the third mistake that Christians make is to

accommodate change to fit the culture And that's what the American and the European churches have done with regard to the sexual revolution in gay marriage It's already happening here in Korea You may have seen last year Yonsei University elected its first openly lesbian student by president But the interesting thing about that election was that the young Christian students at Yonsei responded by criticizing Christians for being condemning of homosexuals So you can always expect that the next generation, the younger generation, is going to be more accepting of the sexual revolution in gay marriage So it will by definition become more accommodating to the society Unless we do what Kuzmich talked about as the fourth point which is to be fully Christian in the midst of the restrictions and

persecution that we're facing And that means to understand Christian marriage fully and deeply and to repent of the ways that we're not practicing it And when I say we I mean we Sadly, some of the worst violations of Christian marriage are found among us pastors and church leaders Whether that be in the form of pornography or failing to mirror to our spouse the relationship between Christ and the church Or effectively being divorced even though we may not be divorced legally So overall in the second point or second principle the key message is this Don't respond Don't respond by fleeing Don't respond by resisting Don't respond by accommodating But let the culture show us the things that we have forgotten about being Christian the areas that we need to improve in our practice And that's

why we say the biggest threat to Christian marriage in Korea is Christian marriage in Korea We need to improve our practice of marriage dramatically So again, at the end of each chapter you'll see recommendations that go into greater levels of detail for existing churches, new churches But let's continue to build on these principles going into the third one We talked about going underground and what that means, unplugging from systems So this third principle It says this Instead of going underground in response to persecution Go underground in order to keep the main thing the main thing What that means is this We should not go underground simply because we're facing some restriction The reason we go underground is so that we can continue to carry out the full functions that God has

charged us with So one of the most important sections of the book begins on page 72 And it addresses the question, when is the church obligated to go underground?

When must it go underground? So we're not going underground to save ourselves We're not going underground to stay safe We are going underground in order to carry out the functions that God has given us as a church So you see the three bullet points there when we are obligated to go underground The first one says we're obligated to go underground when the government determines who may preach, what may be preached, or where preaching may take place So anytime any of those three situations arise we are obligated to go underground Why obligated?

So that we can carry out the full functions instead of limiting our functions The biggest problem we see happening in churches around the world today in terms of restrictions is that the church prefers to stay above ground and then limit its activities rather than going underground to be fully Christian So for example in China what is the problem of the registered church? What makes it so that we would say there needs to be an underground church in China? Because some people will say I think people should just join the three-celled church, the registered church And the issue is these three points Government licensing of who may preach through the three-celled movement which is a part of the Chinese government The restriction on what may be preached So for example we in that setting could not say anything about the incompatibility of communism and Christianity But the big problem of course in China where we may preach We can preach in licensed buildings And this is not biblically an acceptable condition for the church So the church must be free to preach the gospel everywhere

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/pyLEvuSInQg.mp4>

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