BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY

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Category: Observations

The news that British missionary couple David and Fiona Fulton have been imprisoned for a year of hard labour will come as a shock to many people (story here) . The Fultons and their young daughter have all my sympathy and pray that the Lord would keep them safe through what is undoubtedly a horrific ordeal.

However, I don't think that many people who work in the missionary or development work will be all that surprised either. The key to the issue comes in this sentence from the BBC:

> *David and Fiona Fulton were arrested last month after sending a letter to groups and individuals which criticised the country's government.*

I suspect that the letter that they sent out was their regular prayer letter such as many missionaries send out (you can sign up for our prayer news on the sidebar of this site). However, when writing newsletters from many parts of the world,Â it is important to remember that governments are not always as open to criticism and comment as we are used to in the West. There are times when Christians should speak up and condemn injustice, but there is often a heavy price to pay when they do so. But it is also true that missionaries can easily slip into criticising a government without really thinking about it - especially in what they think is a private email. Writing newsletters can be a tricky occupation. These days, nothing is really private. Emails can be spied upon and well meaning supporters can put information on church websites which could well stir up a storm. I know of one case of a Church who asked for prayer for their members who had to work with corrupt government officials in one particular country - just imagine the result if those government officals had done a Google search for the missionaries and come up with that quote!

I don't know what lies behind the Fultons' story; whether they took a stand against something the government were doing and are paying the consequences or whether it was a chance remark in an email or somewhere between these extremes. However, knowing how sensitive some governments can be, I'm not surprised by their plight. If you are dealing with information concerning missionaries or aid workers in far away places - do be careful what you say in a public forum.

May God keep them safe in his arms and encourage them.