

Are We Losing Religious Freedom?

Sunday Evening Bible Study

February 14, 2016

Religious freedom is the freedom to worship according to individual conscience, without being restrained from acting according to conscience or coerced to act against conscience, unless the exercise of religion deprives another individual of their basic civil rights (life, liberty, property, etc.). Even if the result of religious freedom is a public protest and criticism of the state's policies, the state's role is to restrain evil and serve as an impartial referee to insure a fair competition between religions. This freedom includes the right to change one's religion and beliefs and to persuade others to do so.

The Bible On Religious Freedom

1. There is a separation between the church (things that are God's) and the state (things that are Caesar's). Mt. 22:21; Jn. 18:36; Ro. 13:1-8.
2. The church should not govern the actions of the state/civil government (Lk. 12:13,14)
3. The state/civil government should not govern the actions of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 6:7).
4. The Golden Rule makes gives this freedom to non-Christian religions (Lk. 6:31).
5. The state has an interest in promoting and encouraging religions, especially Christianity, because they "promote the general welfare" of the nation (Titus 2:15; 1 Tim. 2:2; 1 Th. 4:11).
6. When the two realms (church and state) collide, the church and the state should make reasonable effort to accommodate and compromise. If the state requires the Christian to disobey God, the Christian must protest injustice (Mt. 14:4; Jn. 19:11) and obey God (Acts 5:29).

Religious Freedom American Style

- 1620 Pilgrims, English Protestant separatists, flee persecution of the Church of England and establish Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts.
- 1630 Puritans view America as a New Jerusalem. John Winthrop, Gov. of Massachusetts, calls Massachusetts colony "a city set upon a hill" to serve as a beacon for the world to see true Christianity. Puritans see little separation between church and state.
- 1632 George Calvert, 1st Lord Baltimore, an English Roman Catholic politician and member of Parliament, establishes Maryland Colony as a place where he can make money off of the tobacco trade and where Roman Catholics will not be persecuted.
- 1638 Baptist pastor, Roger Williams, forced from Massachusetts Colony. Williams establishes Rhode Island as a refuge for Baptists. Founded First Baptist Church in America.
- 1644 Samuel Rutherford, Scottish Presbyterian minister, writes "Lex, Rex: The Law Is King" advocating rule of law, limited government, constitutionalism, and two-kingdom theory.
- 1750 (circa) Jonathan Edwards, like many Puritans, begin to see that the state, run by Puritans was not the "beacon" it was supposed to be. His role in the First Great Awakening is subversive to the state. George Whitefield is banned from preaching in American churches. Benjamin Franklin raised money to build a meeting hall in Philadelphia *"expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people of Philadelphia; the design of the building not being to accommodate any particular sect...so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohametanism to us, he would find a pulpit in his service."*
- 1763 Patrick Henry defends Baptists in Virginia who do not want to pay taxes to support Episcopalian pastors or submit to being regulated by the Episcopal church. Henry argues in court that London has no right to tax Virginia in order to support the Episcopal church.

- 1776 Founders sign Declaration, agreeing that Congregationalists (John Hancock), Presbyterian (John Witherspoon), Catholics (Charles Carrol), Deists (Thomas Jefferson) and Episcopalians (Richard Henry Lee) all have to work together to resist the tyranny of Great Britain and form a nation. No Baptists signed the Declaration. The Declaration affirms that civil rights come from God, not the state.
- 1789 The U.S. Constitution is ratified by the states only after ten amendments (the Bill of Rights) are added to limit and define the power of the federal government at the insistence of Patrick Henry and other anti-federalists.
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.
- 1802 President Jefferson writes a response to Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut, a beleaguered minority. Jefferson says there is a “wall of separation between church and state.” The wall is between the church and federal government, but not between the church and state governments. Jefferson has no jurisdiction in Connecticut.
- 1868 The Bill of Rights is applied to the states by the 14th amendment.
- 1954 US Congress amends IRS code and prohibits pastors and churches from explicitly saying they support or oppose any candidate by name to retain tax-exempt status.
- 1964 Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. [not sexual orientation].
- 1973 Supreme Court denies the rights of the states to protect unborn children by discovering a “right to privacy” in the 14th amendment in (Roe v. Wade).
- 1983 Supreme Court denies that the First Amendment prevents the IRS (est. 1862) from revoking tax-exempt status *when practices are contrary to compelling government policies* such as racial discrimination (Bob Jones University v. United States of America).
- 2015 Supreme Court denies the rights of the states to define marriage as one man and one woman (Obergefell vs. Hodges).

How the loss of religious freedom will probably progress:

1. Faithful Christians coerced and silenced in the marketplace and public square.
 - 1.1 Forcing Christians to legitimize immoral behavior (ex. Sweet Cakes by Melissa, 2014).
 - 1.2 Forced to fund immoral behavior (ex. Burwell vs. Hobby Lobby, 2014)
 - 1.3 Denied employment or promotions (ex. Mozilla CEO, Brendan Eich)
 - 1.4 Exposed to boycotts, hatred. (Ex. Chik-Fil-A and the Art of Marriage)
 - 1.5 Denied access to university campuses (Ex. Vanderbilt and Intervarsity).
2. Faithful Christians forced from government service and benefits:
 - 2.1 Forced to legitimize immoral behavior (Ex. county clerks)
 - 2.2 Expect: Kept from elected office, denied government contracts, rejected as adoptive parents.
3. Christian institutions/schools/para-church compelled to support immoral government policies.
 - 3.1 Expect: Revocation of tax-exempt status
 - 3.2 Expect: Refusal to grant accreditation
4. Churches coerced, controlled, marginalized, and silenced.
 - 4.1 Threats and intimidation: (ex. Mayor of Houston, 2014)
 - 4.2 Fines and imprisonment: “Hate speech” legislation silencing pastors
 - 4.3 Expect: Revocation of tax-exempt status: “The power to tax involves the power to destroy.”