

What Does it Mean to Have Freedom of Religion?

Acts 5:27-32

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

1. Understanding the history of religious freedom.

. First 350 years – Persecution of the church by the State.

. A.D. 390-1600's – Domination of the church by the state.

. A.D. 1600 – The present – Reformation of the church without state control.

"The church has no power of the sword to punish or to coerce – no authority to compel, no prisons, fines or other punishments like those inflicted by the civil magistrate... The church does not assume to itself what belongs to the Magistrate, nor can the Magistrate execute that which is executed by the church."

John Calvin (1600)

John Locke – heavily quoted by our Founding Fathers.

In his writings he quoted the Bible

1500 times.

2. Understanding the first amendment of the United States.

. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

. Bill of Rights

- 1st 10 amendments

- Designed to respond to objections concerns or fears in the Constitution.

- Adds specific guarantees of personal freedoms and limits the powers of the Federal government.

3. Understanding the origin of the phrase “separation of Church and State.”

Key word – Protection of the church from the state.

Danbury Baptist Association wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson – He replied reassuring the pastors – The first amendment was designed to protect the church from the government.

Quaker Pastor – (1877)

“The separation of church and state does not mean the exclusion of God, righteousness or morality from the state.”

1947- Everson vs Board of Ed

- re-interpreted Jefferson’s phrase to exclude the church from the public square.

Until Reagan, Presidents had mentioned God an average of 46% of all the speeches they gave. Reagan referred to God and/or the Bible in 96% of all his speeches.

True Reagan by James Rosebush

“Here then, is our formula for completing our crusade for freedom. Here is the strength of our civilization and our belief in the right of humanity Our faith is in a higher law. Yes, we believe in prayer and its power. We hold that humanity was meant not to be dishonored by the all-powerful state, but to live in the image and likeness of Him who made us.”

Ronald Reagan – 1988 Speech

4. Understanding the Christian influence on our nation.

NOT...

- Christianity as the established religion.

- Compelling everyone to be a Christian.

- Clear requirement to hold office.

BUT...

. Seeing the historical influence on our institutions.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. Ps 33:12
Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. Prov.
14:34

1782 – Congress- in response to the shortage of Bibles authorized the printing of
“Bibles for the use of schools.”

. Seeing the philosophical influence on our constitutions
Look for able men from all the people... place such men over the people...
Ex. 18:21

...Pick out from among you. Acts 6:3

“We are a religious people and
our institutions presuppose
a Supreme Being.”
Chief Justice William Douglas

“We must never forget the God from whom our blessings flowed.”
First Chief Justice John Jay

. Seeing the practical influence on our concept of individual responsibility.
Whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Gal 6:7

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and
opens the door... Rev. 3:20

“ The Christian religion is a religion of all others most friendly to liberty, science, and the
freest expansion of the human mind.”
Thomas Jefferson - 1801

5. Understanding the perspective of the New Testament toward government.

. Give to the government what is due – (Matt. 22:21; Rom 13:1,7)

. Be light and salt to the government. (Matt. 5:13,14)
(Acts 24)

. Pray for the government.
(1Tim. 2:2)

. Take a stand when there is a clear conflict between God’s word and the State.
Charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.
Acts 4:18

But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.” (19)

... for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.
(20)

- A day for respect!
- A day for compassion!
- A day for righteousness!
- A day for courage!