

The Consequences of Ideas
Lesson 27: **Preserving Religious Liberty**

Are the religious liberties of Christians currently being curtailed or threatened in any of the following arenas? - public education: - the media: - popular culture: - politics and government: - the courts:

I. Introduction

- a. When freedom of religion is put in jeopardy the bulwarks of social order are undermined. Therefore, **preserving** religious liberty is the task of every believer and every Christian church.
- b. The struggle for religious **liberty** across the centuries has been long and arduous beginning with the Jews. *Ex 5:1-2 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go. KJV*
- c. Every student of the Bible knows that religious liberty is not a novel idea or recent development, but is grounded in the character of **Jesus Christ** Himself. *Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.*
- d. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He taught that there is a clear dividing line between the sacred and the secular and that no man (**government**) should intrude into the things that belong to God. *Matthew 22:21 Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.*
- e. Determined to follow Jesus faithfully in life and death, the early Christians assumed that their rulers would **acknowledge** the duty of men to obey God. *Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. KJV*
- f. Thus the **right** to religious freedom has its foundation in the example of Christ Himself and that of the Apostles. Freedom of religion is a right established by God and ought to be acknowledged by all men.
- g. Our founders proclaimed that religious freedom is a right found in the very dignity of the human person who is created in the image of God, and this is knowable by all in the exercise of **right reason**.
- h. The founders of the U.S. Constitution were profoundly aware of the relationship between freedom of religion as a matter of **conscience** as a basis for the overall freedom of the individual.

II. Conscience As a Basis

- a. The word Conscience implies, in its very structure, a reference to God, meaning literally, "knowledge **along with** another," the other being God.
- b. Conscience is that faculty of the mind, or inborn sense of right and wrong, by which we judge of the moral character of human conduct. It is common to **all men**. Like all our other faculties, it has been perverted by the Fall.
- c. Because of the importance of the conscience in determining free moral agency, no man is truly free in any sense of the word "*freedom*" where that man is not able to act in **accordance** with his own conscience.
- d. Christians confess that God **alone** is Lord of the conscience and for that reason; government must not attempt to constrain or coerce man's conscience because a free conscience is the cornerstone of religious liberty.
- e. No one should be compelled to embrace any religion against his will, nor should persons of faith be **forbidden** to worship and obey God according to the dictates of their consciences.
- f. Religious liberty means that the individual may express freely in words and deeds, **publicly**, his deeply held religious convictions. What is true for individuals applies to the church as a body as well.
- g. It is ironic that those who assert a right to kill the unborn, aged and disabled and also claim a right to engage in immoral sexual practices, and even a right to be "married" would **deny** the rights of those who oppose them.
- h. That is precisely what we have seen in recent history as the religious liberties of Christians have come under **assault** in the United States and other countries.

III. Assault on Religious Liberties

- a. In the past few years, as denial of religious liberty has spread through the culture like a cancer, we have seen case after case demonstrating what **happens** when laws are enacted which violate the consciences of true believers.
- b. We see this in the effort to weaken or eliminate conscience **clauses**, and therefore to compel pro-life institutions and pro-life physicians and other health care professionals, to participate in abortions.
- c. We see it in the use of antidiscrimination statutes to **force** religious institutions, businesses, and service providers of various sorts to comply with activities they judge to be deeply immoral or to go out of business.
- d. After the judicial imposition of "same-sex marriage" in Massachusetts, Catholic Charities chose to end its placement of orphaned children rather than comply with a legal mandate that it place children in **same-sex** households.
- e. In New Jersey, which enacted a "civil unions" scheme, a Methodist institution was stripped of its **tax exempt status** when it declined to permit a facility it owned and operated to be used for ceremonies blessing homosexual unions.

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- f. In Canada and some European nations, Christian clergy have been prosecuted for preaching Biblical norms against the practice of homosexuality. New **hate-crime** laws in America raise the specter of the same practice here.
- g. In recent decades a growing body of **case law** has paralleled the decline in respect for religious values in the media, the higher education and political leadership, resulting in restrictions on the free exercise of religion.
- h. We view this as an ominous development because of its **threat** to the individual liberty guaranteed to every person, regardless of his or her faith.
- i. This trend also threatens the **common** welfare and the culture of freedom on which our system of republican government is founded.
- j. Instances of **restrictions** on the freedom of conscience or the ability to hire people of one's own faith or conscientious moral convictions for religious institutions are growing in nearly every state in the Union.
- k. When this happens, the viability of non-governmental social service providers, the essential **buffer** against the overweening authority of the state, are threatened, resulting in a type of soft despotism.
- l. Disintegration of civil society is a prelude to **tyranny** and laws which violate religious liberty are a definite move toward that disintegration.
- m. As Christians, we take seriously the Biblical admonition to respect and obey those in authority. We believe in law and in the **rule of law**.
- n. We recognize the duty to comply with laws whether we happen to like them or not, **unless** the laws are gravely unjust or require those subject to them to do something unjust or otherwise immoral.
- o. The biblical purpose of law is to preserve order and serve justice and the common good; yet laws that are **unjust**—and especially laws that purport to compel citizens to do what is unjust—undermine the common good, rather than serve it.

IV. Our Declaration

- a. As Christians we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes **required**.
- b. Christian writers such as Augustine and Aquinas taught that just laws elevate and ennoble human beings because they are **rooted** in the moral law whose ultimate source is God Himself.
- c. Unjust laws degrade human beings. Inasmuch as they can claim no authority beyond sheer human will, they lack any power **to bind** in conscience. A law which does not bind in conscience is no law at all.
- d. Because we honor true justice and the common good, we **will not** comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia.
- e. Nor will conscience permit us to tacitly approve of any other anti-life act; nor will we **bend** to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent.
- f. We are constrained by conscience to proclaim the truth as we know it about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We can not for conscience sake **cease** and desist from speaking out against immoral evil in any form.
- g. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under **no** circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God's.

V. Application

- a. What we have seen in this series is that the consequences of ideas of natural men are significant and lasting. Beginning in the Garden of Eden down to the present day these ideas have run counter to God in nearly every case. *Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD . KJV*
- b. However, ours is not essentially a battle against laws nor is it a struggle against men; the battle we face is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers; this is a spiritual battle. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. KJV*
- c. Our task has been to become aware of the ideas of men that pose an immanent threat to our Christian beliefs and practice, ideas which left unchallenged or ignored would pervert the Christian faith into a meaningless religious system.
- d. The question posed to each of us is: Of what effect is having knowledge of these things if we, as individuals, take no action?
- e. Have you signed The Manhattan Declaration? If not, go to ManhattanDeclaration.org and do so right away. Then send the link, manhattandeclaration.org, to five of your friends and urge them to read and sign it.
- f. Begin using The Manhattan Declaration as a resource for your prayers. Begin praying – and keep praying – that God will rally Christians throughout the nation to stand boldly for the matters raised in The Manhattan Declaration.