

BF&M 17: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Memory Verses: *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" 1 Timothy 2:1-2.*

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Stated simply, the principle of religious liberty is that no human being has the right to determine another person's belief through c_____. It is legitimate to persuade, to convince, to proclaim, to witness—but not to coerce belief through the use of force.

A Biblical Doctrine

Baptists turn to the B_____ when discussing religious liberty. Two examples show why.

King Darius threatened Daniel with death in a lions' den if he prayed to any god or man other than Darius himself for 30 days. Refusing to let the state dictate the nature, content, or timing of his prayer life, Daniel boldly "went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously" (Dan. 6:10, ESV). Daniel fearlessly fed the spirit of freedom which Baptists later adopted.

Jealous over the fact that "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles," the high priest and Sadducees "arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison." Released by an angel of the Lord during the night, the apostles entered the temple courts and began to teach the people. Brought before the Sanhedrin, they "strictly charged (them) not to teach in this name." Peter and the other apostles responded, "'We must obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:12, 18, 28, 29, ESV). Baptists read this passage on liberty of conscience and say, "Amen."

Religious liberty is not a gift of the ____ C_____ but the gift of God. The very fact that God created humans as moral and spiritual beings, possessing a moral c_____, indicates that God intends for His human creatures to be both free and responsible, **Gen. 1:26-28, Josh. 24:15.**

READ THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES AND MATCH WITH THE CORRECT SUMMARY STATEMENT:

___ 1. John 8:32

___ 2. John 8:36

___ 3. Acts 4:19-20

___ 4. Philippians 3:20

a. God should have first place in our allegiance.

b. True freedom comes from Jesus Christ.

c. People are set free by God's truth.

d. The Christian's primary citizenship is in heaven.

The principle of religious liberty also rests on the biblical teaching that God alone is sovereign. Ultimately, we are accountable to Him and to Him alone. Only Jesus could say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18, ESV).

A Baptist Distinctive

For almost 400 years, Baptists have saturated their life and literature with appreciation for religious liberty. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, Baptists' first two pastors, set the pace in the early 1600s. They wrote bold statements of support for this conviction. In fact, Helwys died in an English prison because King James I, who would not tolerate such liberty, put him there.

Baptists' first two pastors in America also experienced persecution. Roger Williams, banished from Massachusetts by religious authorities, formed America's first Baptist church at Providence, Rhode Island, in the late 1630s. And John Clarke, who founded the second Baptist church, at Newport, Rhode Island, was imprisoned in Massachusetts for preaching. Williams and Clarke set in motion a long line of colonial Baptists who suffered jailings, banishments, public whippings, and dismissals from high posts because of their commitments to freedom.

In the late 1700s, Isaac Backus in New England and John Leland in Virginia wrote powerful arguments in favor of religious liberty. They boldly advanced their positions in the contexts of the persecution of Baptists by the authorities of church and state. Leland had a powerful influence on James Madison, who saw to it that religious freedom was provided for in our constitution. Baptists have always been defenders of religious liberty and its corollary, the principle of the separation of church and state.

The BF&M begins with the affirmation that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it." This statement introduces a very important fact: we are not free from the commandments and doctrines of G_____

W_____ but from the dictates and commandments of earthly powers *that are in any way contrary* to God's Word. In other words, human beings are not really a_____. We will one day answer to God for our beliefs, actions, thoughts, and words. Our modern culture, especially in the developed nations, increasingly sees humanity as fully autonomous, with every individual totally free to define his or her own existence. This is not a biblical understanding of human freedom. Rather, we are called to respect human authorities (see Rom. 13:1-7), but government has no right to demand ultimate allegiance—only God does.

Church and State

"Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends...A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal...." Baptists reject the idea of a state church and have resisted and rejected the idea that the church should rely on the state to accomplish its gospel m_____ and m_____.

At the same time, the modern idea generally described in the larger culture as the separation of church and state most often means an artificial exclusion of all religious belief and expression from the p_____ s_____. Some courts and other authorities have imposed an open hostility toward religion, often driven by advocates of a radical form of secularism. Baptists must insist that the church should be independent of the state, but we must also insist that the state must not be hostile to the church or to the free and full participation of all citizens—including Christians—in the public life of the nation. Christians must be free to bring their b_____ i_____ understanding of moral truth to the nation's public policy debates and the salt and light that Christ has commanded them to be (see Matt. 5:13-16), even as they contend for full religious liberty for all citizens, whatever their faith (or lack of faith).

Loyal Obedience

Religious liberty also requires that Christian citizens obey the government and its laws. Jesus instructed His disciples to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). This means that Christians, like other citizens, must p___ taxes and o_____ the laws of the state. Paul expanded on this point, instructing Christians to submit to the government, **Rom. 13:1**. He explained that governing authorities are God's servants, meant to protect law-abiding citizens and punish those who break the law, **Rom. 13:3-5**. The government has the right to tax, as well as a right and responsibility to maintain order and to protect its citizens. But no government has the right to coerce the conscience or to persecute citizens because of their religious convictions.

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Stated simply, the principle of religious liberty is that no human being has the right to determine another person's belief through c_____. It is legitimate to persuade, to convince, to proclaim, to witness—but not to coerce belief through the use of force.

A Biblical Doctrine

Baptists turn to the B_____ when discussing religious liberty. Two examples show why.

King Darius threatened Daniel with death in a lions' den if he prayed to any god or man other than Darius himself for 30 days. Refusing to let the state dictate the nature, content, or timing of his prayer life, Daniel boldly "went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously" (Dan. 6:10, ESV). Daniel fearlessly fed the spirit of freedom which Baptists later adopted.

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a. God should have first place in our allegiance.

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The principle of religious liberty also rests on the biblical teaching that God alone is sovereign. Ultimately, we are accountable to Him and to Him alone. Only Jesus could say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18, ESV).

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"Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends...A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal...." Baptists reject the idea of a state church and have resisted and rejected the idea that the church should rely on the state to accomplish its gospel m_____ and m_____.

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Stated simply, the principle of religious liberty is that no human being has the right to determine another person's belief through c_____. It is legitimate to persuade, to convince, to proclaim, to witness—but not to coerce belief through the use of force.

A Biblical Doctrine

Baptists turn to the B_____ when discussing religious liberty. Two examples show why.

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"Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends...A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal...." Baptists reject the idea of a state church and have resisted and rejected the idea that the church should rely on the state to accomplish its gospel m_____ and m_____.

At the same time, the modern idea generally described in the larger culture as the separation of church and state most often means an artificial exclusion of all religious belief and expression from the p_____ s_____. Some courts and other authorities have imposed an open hostility toward religion, often driven by advocates of a radical form of secularism. Baptists must insist that the church should be independent of the state, but we must also insist that the state must not be hostile to the church or to the free and full participation of all citizens—including Christians—in the public life of the nation. Christians must be free to bring their b_____ i_____ understanding of moral truth to the nation's public policy debates and the salt and light that Christ has commanded them to be (see Matt. 5:13-16), even as they contend for full religious liberty for all citizens, whatever their faith (or lack of faith).

Loyal Obedience

Religious liberty also requires that Christian citizens obey the government and its laws. Jesus instructed His disciples to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). This means that Christians, like other citizens, must p___ taxes and o_____ the laws of the state. Paul expanded on this point, instructing Christians to submit to the government, **Rom. 13:1**. He explained that governing authorities are God's servants, meant to protect law-abiding citizens and punish those who break the law, **Rom. 13:3-5**. The government has the right to tax, as well as a right and responsibility to maintain order and to protect its citizens. But no government has the right to coerce the conscience or to persecute citizens because of their religious convictions.