

**RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM**

*"WE HONOR EARTHLY AUTHORITY,
BUT WE WORSHIP GOD ALONE."*

*"RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ISN'T SIMPLY THE
FREEDOM TO WORSHIP GOD ON SUNDAY;
IT IS THE FREEDOM TO FAITHFULLY
FOLLOW HIM EVERY DAY."*



FREE *TO* LIVE FAITHFULLY

Religious freedom is more than the freedom to attend church. It is the freedom to believe, worship, speak, and live according to deeply held convictions without being forced to violate one's conscience.

For the Christian, religious freedom begins with a simple declaration: **Jesus is Lord.**

Our highest allegiance belongs to Him. Throughout Scripture, God's people lived under kings, governors, empires, and civil authorities. They were instructed to honor governing authorities, pray for leaders, seek the good of their communities, and live peacefully with others.

But Scripture also establishes a boundary no earthly authority can cross: **Government is not God.**

When human authority requires what God forbids—or forbids what God requires—the believer's ultimate allegiance remains with God. That conviction lies at the heart of religious freedom.

FAITH CANNOT *BE* COERCED

Throughout Scripture, God calls people to respond to Him. Moses told Israel: **“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses... Oh, that you would choose life.” — Deuteronomy 30:19**

God calls. He commands. He reveals truth. Yet genuine faith involves a response of the heart. Joshua similarly challenged Israel to “choose today whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Religious freedom does not mean every belief is true. Scripture makes truth claims that Christians cannot abandon. But there is an important difference between proclaiming truth and coercing belief.

Government can regulate conduct for the protection of society, but it cannot manufacture genuine faith.

Faith compelled by force is not faith.

This is one reason freedom of religion and conscience matters so deeply.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSCIENCE

Scripture treats conscience seriously.

In Romans 14, Paul addresses believers who disagreed about matters of practice. Rather than commanding government or even church leaders to compel uniformity on every disputed matter, Paul writes: **“You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable.” — Romans 14:5**

Paul is not teaching that truth is relative. Elsewhere he speaks boldly and uncompromisingly about truth. Rather, he recognizes that people are accountable before God for their actions and convictions. Later he asks: **“Why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.” — Romans 14:10**

Ultimately, conscience exists under God’s authority. That means Christians should be very cautious about demanding that another person violate conscience simply because those in power disagree with it.

A government powerful enough to violate someone else's conscience today may be powerful enough to violate yours tomorrow.

WHEN OBEDIENCE TO GOD & GOVERNMENT COLLIDE

Scripture commands Christians to respect governing authority.

Romans 13:1-7 describes civil government as instituted by God. First Peter 2:13-17 instructs believers to honor those in authority. First Timothy 2:1-2 calls us to pray for kings and others in leadership. Christians should therefore not treat every disagreement with government as persecution or every unwanted law as an attack on religious liberty.

But biblical submission to government is not absolute. Daniel continued praying to God when the king's decree prohibited it (Daniel 6). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image even when threatened with death (Daniel 3). When authorities commanded Peter and the apostles to stop teaching in Jesus' name, Peter answered: **"We must obey God rather than any human authority."** — Acts 5:29

These believers were not rebellious simply for the sake of rebellion. They had reached a line they could not cross. Human authority had demanded something contrary to obedience to God.

Their response establishes an important principle: **We honor earthly authority, but we worship God alone.**

JESUS IS LORD *OVER THE* WHOLE LIFE

Religious freedom is sometimes reduced to “freedom of worship”—the ability to gather inside a church building for a religious service. That freedom is essential. But biblical faith does not remain inside the walls of a church.

Jesus calls us to follow Him everywhere. Our faith shapes the way we raise our children, conduct our businesses, practice our professions, use our Resources, speak, serve, create, teach, and interact with our neighbors. Paul writes: **“And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus.”**
— **Colossians 3:17**

There is no biblical division between the Christian we are on Sunday and the person we become on Monday.

If faith is meant to shape our whole lives, religious freedom must include the ability to live faithfully beyond the walls of a church.

FREEDOM *FOR* OUR NEIGHBOR

There is another side of religious freedom Christians must not overlook. We should not defend this freedom only when Christians benefit from it.

Jesus commands us: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.” — Matthew 22:39**

If we desire the freedom to worship, speak, raise our children, and live according to our convictions, we should recognize that same basic freedom of conscience for our neighbors. That includes people whose beliefs differ profoundly from ours. Defending another person's religious liberty does not require affirming that person's theology.

We can disagree about truth while defending one another's freedom to seek, believe, speak, and worship without coercion.

Why? Because Christians do not need government to force people into Christianity. We want people to encounter Christ, hear the Gospel, repent, and follow Him genuinely. Our confidence is not in coercion. **Our confidence is in the power of the Gospel.**

WHY THIS MATTERS TODAY: *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM*

Questions of religious freedom increasingly appear in debates involving education, employment, healthcare, professional licensing, parental rights, religious organizations, freedom of speech, and the ability of individuals and institutions to operate according to their convictions.

These questions can be difficult. Religious liberty does not automatically exempt every person from every generally applicable law simply because he or she raises a religious objection. Governments also have legitimate responsibilities to protect citizens, preserve order, and administer justice.

That is why Christians need wisdom.

The question isn't whether believers should receive special privileges. A better question is:

Are people being unnecessarily forced to choose between obeying the law and remaining faithful to sincerely held religious convictions?

When government enters matters of conscience, the consequences deserve careful scrutiny. Christians should therefore pay attention when laws or policies affect the ability of individuals, families, churches, ministries, schools, or other religious organizations to live consistently with their faith. Religious freedom isn't merely about protecting what happens on Sunday.

It protects our ability to carry our faith beyond Sunday.

THINK BIBLICALLY: *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM*

When considering a cultural issue, proposed law, candidate, or public-policy debate affecting religious freedom, ask:

- **Does this respect the freedom of individuals to worship and practice their faith?**

- Does this unnecessarily force someone to act against a sincerely held religious conviction?
- Does this allow churches and religious organizations to remain faithful to their beliefs and mission?
- Does this protect the ability of parents to pass their faith to their children?
- Am I defending religious freedom as a principle
—or only when it benefits people who believe as I do?

These questions help us defend religious liberty consistently rather than politically.

ENGAGE FAITHFULLY: *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM*

Religious freedom survives when people understand it, practice it, and defend it.

Know your faith. Religious liberty means little if we are unwilling to live according to the convictions we claim to hold.

Practice your faith openly. Pray, worship, serve, disciple your children, gather with believers, and carry your faith into everyday life.

Respect your neighbor. Defend the dignity and basic freedom of those whose religious beliefs differ from your own.

Know the issues. Pay attention when legislation or public policy affects churches, ministries, religious schools, families, conscience rights, or freedom of religious expression.

Speak graciously and courageously. Contact elected officials and decision-makers when religious liberty is threatened.

Vote thoughtfully. Consider whether candidates and policies will protect the freedom of people and institutions to live according to sincerely held religious convictions.

Pray for those in authority. Even when you strongly disagree with them, Scripture calls us to pray that we may live “peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:2).

And when obedience becomes costly, remember the believers who came before us. Faithfulness has never depended upon cultural approval.

BEYOND SUNDAY: *RELIGIOUS FREEDOM*

Religious freedom isn't ultimately about protecting our comfort.

It protects space for conviction. For the Gospel to be proclaimed. For churches to worship. For parents to disciple their children. For believers to carry their faith into their workplaces and communities. For people to wrestle honestly with questions of truth. And for Christians to live under the lordship of Jesus Christ without being forced to separate their public lives from their faith.

We should cherish that freedom. We should extend it to our neighbors. We should defend it when it is threatened. And we should use it faithfully while we have it. Because religious freedom isn't simply the freedom to worship God on Sunday.

It is the freedom to faithfully follow Him every day.

***KNOW THE WORD. THINK BIBLICALLY.
ENGAGE FAITHFULLY.***