

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Religious Liberty

- Matthew 22:15-22 - Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they *sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. And He *said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They *said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He *said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” And hearing *this*, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

XVII. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. (continued on next slide)

XX RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

A BAPTIST PRINCIPLE

- Religious liberty has always been a Baptist principle. Our commitment is to religious liberty for all peoples, not just for Baptists, because we believe that every human being is created in God's image and possesses full rights and freedoms granted by the Creator, as well as full accountability.

A BAPTIST PRINCIPLE

- Religious liberty is not a gift of the U.S. Constitution but the gift of God. The very fact that God created humans as moral and spiritual beings, possessing a moral conscience, indicates that God intends for His human creatures to be both free and responsible.

A BAPTIST PRINCIPLE

- Soul Competency – Every individual is responsible to God, and accountable to him. Therefore, no person or institution (including the government or the church) has the right or power to intervene between each person and God. This truth refers to all people, Christians and non-Christians.
- Early American Baptists such as Roger Williams, John Clarke, and Obadiah Holmes were primarily responsible for this truth becoming a bedrock American tenet.

A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE STATE

- Religious liberty is not mere legal toleration. Instead, it is the recognition that the very nature of humanity implies respect for this right and liberty. No government has the right to claim coercive power over any individual's conscience in matters of faith and religious belief.
- This does not mean religious belief and expression should be absent from the public square. It means the state must not be hostile to the church or to the free and full participation of all citizens in the public life of the nation.

A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE STATE

- The rights of all religious groups must be respected and protected, even the rights of religious minorities and unpopular religious movements. No church is to be preferred over another.
- Because Baptists suffered persecution under governments that had established state-privileged churches, we have been ardent proponents of true nonpreferential religious liberty.

A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE STATE

- The gospel of Christ “contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.” The church must be free to fulfill its gospel ministry as assigned by Christ and it must fulfill that ministry without interference or assistance from the state.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

- Romans 13:1-7 - Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (continued on next slide)

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

(continued) Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

- Religious liberty also requires that Christian citizens obey the government and its laws.
- The government has a 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.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

- God has two purposes for government: good and justice. The goal of government should be to build a foundation of peace, order, and flourishing that every human being who chooses to can build their lives upon.
- As believers we are called to be faithful citizens, submitting to our governing authorities, insofar as we are not asked to violate God's Word, and doing what we can to lead our government to work toward good and justice for others
- This allows us as the church to fulfill our mission, to help others to come to know God and make him known (1 Tim 2:1-4).