

A Government To Fear (Part One)

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In 1969, after attending Ambassador College, Evelyn and I were assigned to what was then called the Long Beach and the Anaheim congregations. We later were assigned to larger geographical areas elsewhere in the United States, but none that were as densely populated as that original assignment. Our geographical area covered the entire southern half of Los Angeles County and almost all of Orange County, and thus, the area covered virtually all the beach cities in those two counties. It stretched all the way from Santa Monica on the west of Los Angeles County to Costa Mesa, and then continued further south to San Clemente, on the border of Orange County and San Diego County.

The congregations would occasionally hold picnics at the beach areas, and in addition, our family occasionally got together with other families for smaller such occasions. I was very frequently visiting with people interested in the church who lived in those beach cities. Now remember, this is liberal Southern California. In the beach cities, because of the drawing power of the ocean for swimming and sandy beaches for things like volleyball and just hanging out, virtually everything— especially the dress attire—was very informal. Even so, virtually every restaurant in those cities, most especially those nearest the beaches, had a sign (usually posted on the door as one entered, or at least plainly visible in a nearby window, or maybe it was right inside the door) that stated, usually in bold letters, "No shirt, no shoes, no service."

The ownership of the restaurant was thus warning potential customers that it had those stated standards, and it reserved the right to serve or deny service to whom it pleased without having to state any further if the customer did not meet those standards. The reason the restaurant ownership imposed those standards probably had nothing at all to do with the potential customers' character. Rather, the denial of service may have been imposed by an insurance company that just did not want to pay for a potential injury claim

against the restaurant, most especially foot injuries due to stepping on a piece of glass on the restaurant floor.

Those signs have probably disappeared from virtually all restaurants in the United States, but they have been replaced by verbal refusals of service, and usually on the basis of the proprietors' objections to some service involving a religious belief.

This kind of clash is not entirely new to this nation. There have been a number of battle zones created by issues of different standards of righteousness. But my concern is that the drift of the court decisions made in the wake of this wave of differences bodes a great deal of persecution.

In this past month, a lawsuit that involves a challenge against Christian spiritual beliefs and the First Amendment and that had been decided on previously in lower courts came before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and thus the lower court's verdict stands.

The issue involved a woman photographer who was asked via email by another woman to photograph a "commitment ceremony" between herself and another woman a same-sex marriage. The woman photographer politely refused on the basis that this was at odds with her religious beliefs. The woman secured another photographer at a lower price, but at the same time, she sued the original photographer through the state's Human Rights Commission. She won the case and was awarded \$6,637.94 to be taken from the photographer to pay her attorney's fees. The photographer then fought the case as high as she could go in the state system and then, finally, the Supreme Court of the United States. She lost every battle.

I want you to hear what some of the judges stated regarding personally held religious beliefs of Christians. Now, this was from the judge of a state appeals court. He said, "States can demand Christians violate their faith."

But let's change it to a little bit different subject. What about demanding a Christian kill in warfare? What about demanding that the Christian bow down to an idol?

This next one is the decision of the state Supreme Court, and this decision says this:

At its heart, this case teaches that at some point in our lives, all of us must compromise, if only a little, to accommodate the contrasting values of others. A multicultural, pluralistic society, which is one of our nation's strengths, demands no less. The Huguenins [the name of the photographers] are free to think, to say, to believe, as they wish; they may pray to the God of their choice and follow His commandments in their personal lives wherever they lead. The Constitution protects the Huguenins in that respect and much more. But there is a price, one that we all have to pay somewhere in our civic life. . . . In the smaller, more focused world of the marketplace of commerce, of public accommodation, the Huguenins have to channel their conduct, not their beliefs, so as to leave space for other Americans who believe something different. That compromise is part of the glue that holds us together as a nation. The tolerance that lubricates the varied moving parts of us as a people. That sense of respect we owe others, whether or not we believe as they do, illuminates this country, setting it apart from the discord that afflicts much of the rest of the world. In short, I would say to the Huguenins, with utmost respect, it is the price of citizenship.

I do not know whether you caught this as I was reading, but the justices contradicted themselves in this statement when they said "the Huguenins are free to think, say, believe as they wish. They may pray to the God of their choice and follow those commandments in their personal lives wherever they lead." The decision was, though, that the Huguenins were not permitted to follow those commandments in their personal lives wherever they led, because their personal lives led them into conflict with the state's and the federal commands, and they were halted from following their beliefs. In other words, the state's laws trump God's laws where they conflict with loyalty to God.

The Huguenins were unwilling to promote, verbally or in business, any messages that violated God's commandment. The message in this case would

have been that they support same-sex marriage, you see, in conflict with God's law.

Now listen: A government that forces any American to create a message contrary to one's own godly convictions is a government that is to be feared because it *will* impose *its* will, not God's. And so the cold fact is, brethren, that Mrs. Huguenins still has one option left: She can go out of business.

I wanted to read that because it is so clear as to what's happening—that this society has become a place that is clearly at odds with the Bible and God's laws, and something has to give. And the government has decided that they will follow, not God's laws, but the ones that the public is demanding. Very interesting. Shows you where things stand.