

CONTENDING FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

By Andy Manning

Today we are beginning a two-week sermon series called “Excel.” **2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)** “See that you also excel in this grace of giving.” What does it mean to excel? The dictionary says it means to “be exceptionally good at or proficient in an activity or subject.”¹ God commands us to be exceptionally good and proficient at giving.

To excel at something is to become a master. What are some examples of masters? Steph Curry is a master three-point shooter. Drew Brees is a master at throwing a football. JK Rowling is a master storyteller. One of the laws of success is that you must aim at mastering your craft, whatever that may be. But God doesn’t just want you to master your craft, He wants you to become a master-giver. A master-donor. A master at generosity. Examples of master-givers are people like JC Penny. JC Penny (James Cash) is best known as a master-business man, but he was also a master-giver. He was a reverse tither. Instead of giving God 10 percent and living on 90 percent, he gave God 90 percent of his money and lived on 10 percent. Another example is Pastor Rick Warren, author of the best-selling non-fiction book of all time, *The Purpose Driven Life*. When Rick Warren got married, he and his wife set a goal to increase their giving by 1% every year. So the first year they gave 10%, and then 11%, and then 12%. Years later, after writing *The Purpose Driven Life*, he was able to become a reverse-tither, giving 90 and keeping 10. Not only that, but he paid back every penny the church had ever paid him, and he stopped taking a salary from the church even though he is still working, and he is past the normal retirement age. Those are master-givers. Those are people who took 2 Corinthians 8:7 seriously, to excel at the grace of giving.

“Excel” is the name of our Christmas Offering this year. And the focus of our Christmas Offering is threefold: Contending for religious liberty, saving the unborn, and reaching world through missions. Today we’re going to zoom in on the topic of religious liberty.

Let me begin with the story of Asia Bibi. Bibi is a Christian woman from Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country. In 2009 Bibi got in an argument with two fellow female farm workers who refused to drink from a water container used by a Christian. The debate was about Islam vs. Christianity. She was accused of blasphemy, of insulting Islam’s prophet, which is against the law in Pakistan, and she was arrested. In 2010 she was convicted and sentenced to death. Some Pakistanis continued to fight for her freedom, and after nine years in prison, the court overturned her conviction. But she still wasn’t released, because for the next three days, radical Muslims protested all over the country of Pakistan, demanding her execution. According to the Associated Press, the protestors “scorched scores of vehicles, blocked highways, and attacked government and public property. A radical Muslim cleric also

¹ Google Dictionary.

threatened to kill the three judges who acquitted Bibi.” So the government caved in to public pressure and imposed a travel ban on Bibi and are allowing her case to be reviewed. Now there are people all over Pakistan who want to kill her, her family, and the three high court judges. To give you a sense of the danger that they are facing, Bibi’s lawyer has already fled the country for safety, and in 2011, when the Provincial Governor in Pakistan spoke out in defense of Bibi and questioned the blasphemy laws, he was assassinated by his own bodyguard who was “defending Islam.” So this is what life is like for Christians today in some countries. For merely speaking out against Islam, a woman was imprisoned for nine years and sentenced to death, and today she and her family and anyone who defends her is in danger for their lives.

What does that have to do with us? Surely that could never happen in the United States, where we have religious liberty protected by the Constitution, right? Wrong. If it ever gets that bad in America, it’s not going to happen overnight. It’s going to happen slowly, by degrees, as layer after layer of religious liberty is peeled away by a crazy law here, and a radical judge there, until it is no longer legal to be a devout Christian.

And we are seeing the erosion of religious liberty in America today. One example is the case of a baker from Colorado named Jack Phillips. A third of the money we raise in our Christmas Offering will go to support Jack Phillips. Let me tell you his story. Jack is the owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop, which he opened in 1993. He chose that name because as a devout Christian, he wanted everything done in his shop to please his master, the Lord Jesus Christ. He made a decision from the very beginning not to design any cake that would dishonor Christ. He does not design Halloween cakes, cakes that would disparage other people, racist cakes, atheist cakes, anti-American cakes, cakes celebrating divorce, crude cakes for bachelor parties, and he doesn’t design same-sex wedding cakes. Keep in mind that Jack Phillips serves everyone. He serves blacks, whites, Hispanics, gays, lesbians, transgenders, republicans, and democrats. He serves everyone, but he cannot promote all messages, or participate in all events. In 2012 Jack was approached by a same-sex couple to design a cake for their wedding reception. He said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t do a cake for a same-sex wedding. I can pretty much sell you anything in the store, but not that.” They cursed him out, flipped him off, left, and then 20 minutes later his phone started ringing constantly for weeks with people saying horrible, vile things to him. He received death threats. They initiated a boycott and protest against him. Eventually the state’s Civil Rights Commission ordered Jack to design cakes for same-sex couples regardless of his Christian beliefs, to re-educate his staff, and to file quarterly compliance reports for two years. So Jack had no choice but to stop making all wedding cakes, but this cost him dearly. He lost 40% of his business, and had to lay off 6 of his 10 employees, two of whom were family members. With the help of Alliance Defending Freedom, Jack has continued to fight the decision, and this year his case made it to the Supreme Court. The court decided in favor of Jack, but it wasn’t exactly a victory for religious liberty. Not the kind of victory that we need. The decision was that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission violated the State’s duty under the First Amendment not to base laws or regulations on hostility to a religion or religious viewpoint.

So the Supreme Court didn't say that the Colorado law that forces a Christian baker to make a gay wedding cake is a bad law; only that it was based on wrong motives.

So the case for religious liberty in the wake of the sexual revolution is not yet settled. What we need is for the Supreme Court to rule definitively that a business owner cannot be forced to create messages or serve at events that violate their deeply held moral and religious beliefs. And that may happen this year, because Jack Phillips has already been attacked again. A lawyer called Jack and asked him to make a cake celebrating her sex-change from a man to a woman. The lawyer wanted the cake to be blue on the exterior, and pink on the exterior, reflecting her transgender sexual identity. So Phillips declined due to his religious beliefs that sex is immutable, and in response the Colorado Civil Right's Commission is trying to punish him again. So Jack is suing the Civil Right's Commission, and the case will hopefully go to the Supreme Court again where we can get a real victory for religious liberty. But even if his case doesn't make it, it is very like that others just like it will, such Baronelle Stutzman, the Christian florist from Washington, or Aaron and Melissa Klein, the Christian bakers from Oregon.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Why does the Jack Phillips case matter for the rest of us? It's obvious how it affects Christian bakers, but how does it affect us? Let me try to show you some of the repercussions if Jack Phillips loses at the Supreme Court.

Christians will no longer be able to be bakers. If they refuse to do gay wedding cakes, then they will have to get out of the wedding cake business altogether. And that makes up a large portion of a baker's business. Not only that, but if they refuse to bake specialty cakes celebrating a sex change, then they will have to refuse to make all specialty cakes.

Christian property owners will no longer be able to host weddings. Christian restaurant owners will no longer be able to host or cater weddings. Christian DJs, musicians, photographers, florists, wedding planners, and equipment renters will no longer be able to service weddings.

Christian wedding dress makers will have to go out of business.

Christian tuxedo and limo rentals will have to go out of business.

In other words, if Jack Phillips loses at the Supreme Court, then that means that Christians will be forced out of an entire industry – the wedding industry.

But that's not all. If the government is given the power to force a private, small business owner to violate his religious beliefs or go out of business, then it's only a matter of time before the government can force all Christians to get on board with the sexual revolution.

How long will it be before pastors and priests are forced to officiate at gay weddings? How long will it be before churches will be forced to host gay weddings? How long will it be before churches, Christian schools and colleges, and other Christian organizations will be forced to hire gays and transgenders, and to open up their membership to gays and transgenders? How long will it be before Christian publishers will be forced to print books and articles supporting the sexual revolution? How long will it be before public school teachers will be forced to support homosexuality and transgenderism, and fired for speaking out against it? How long will it be before LGBT becomes the new black, and anyone who opposes the sexual revolution will be treated like a bigot? How long will it be before Christians will be fired from their jobs for speaking out against the sexual revolution, or for attending a church that preaches against the sexual revolution? How long will it be before Christians will no longer be qualified to work for the federal, state, or local governments because of their views on marriage and gender?

In short, if the government can force Jack Phillips to bake a gay wedding cake, then it can force him to bake any kind of cake. And if the federal government can force a baker to bake any kind of cake, regardless of his religious and moral beliefs, then we're not far from the federal government having the power to force any of us to do anything.

This is why religious liberty is the most important liberty of all. There is nothing more important to a person than their conscience – their deeply held religious and moral beliefs. So if the government doesn't respect religious liberty, then it has lost respect for all liberty. This issue is that critical.

SHOULD CHRISTIANS JUST BAKE THE CAKE?

So let's spend a little time talking about the importance of religious liberty. Before we talk about what the Bible says about religious liberty, let's just begin with a very practical question. Should Christians just bake the cake? We're supposed to love everybody, right? So shouldn't we just bake the cake? In other words, before we tackle this from a political perspective, let's take it from a moral and religious perspective. Spiritually speaking, morally speaking, should Christians bake the cake even if they have the freedom to decline?

Ultimately, from a spiritual and moral perspective, whether a Christian should bake a gay wedding cake comes down to one thing. Is it a sin? Is it a sin to bake a gay wedding cake, or to do the photography for a gay wedding, or to do the floral arrangements for a gay wedding? Now the answer to that question is controversial, even among Christians. There is no confusion about the Bible's stance on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Those are clearly immoral and against God's will. But even if you don't think it is a sin to bake a gay wedding cake, truly it comes down to the baker's own conscience. It doesn't matter whether you or I think it is not a sin. What does the baker think? And if the baker truly, deeply feels that creating a wedding

cake for a gay couple is against God's will, then for them it is a sin, and they should not bake the cake. It's easy to say, "I would just bake the cake," but we're not talking about what you would do. It's the baker's decision. It is their conscience that matters.

SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE FORCED TO BAKE THE CAKE?

Now let's look at the issue from a political perspective. Should Christians be forced to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, regardless of their religious and moral beliefs?

Let me answer that question with another question. Should a baker be required to bake any kind of cake, regardless of his moral and religious convictions? In other words, should a black baker be required to bake a cake that is racist against blacks? Should a Jew be required to bake a cake that is racist toward Jews? Should a gay baker be required to bake a cake that is anti-gay? Should a Muslim baker be required to bake a cake that insults Islam? Should a Roman Catholic baker be forced to bake a cake that is pro-abortion? Should a Christian baker be forced to bake a cake that is anti-religious, or profane, or sexually explicit? The answer is no. Everyone agrees that a baker should not be required by the government to bake any kind of cake. Bakers should have the freedom to follow their conscience. That's what freedom is all about. We're not giving bakers the freedom to steal from people, or to harm people, or to kill people; we're just talking about the freedom to not bake a cake if it goes against their deeply held moral and religious beliefs. We all agree that bakers should not be required to bake all kinds of cakes, so why should Christian bakers be required to bake a cake that celebrates homosexuality, a sin which the Bible describes as detestable to God?

Here's the answer to that question. The leaders of the LGBT rights movement, whether they realize it or not, are not advocating for equality, they are advocating for superiority. They are not advocating for equal rights, they are advocating for special rights. They would agree, for example, that a gay baker should not be forced to bake a cake that condemns homosexuality, but they would decline to give that same freedom to a Christian baker. Don't be fooled by the LGBT rights movement's words. They claim to be about tolerance, and equality, and acceptance, and freedom, and live and let live. They are not. They want not only the freedom to make their immoral choices, but they want to force the rest of the country to stop condemning their choices. These so-called victims of discrimination and intolerance are not the real victims today; they are the oppressors. It is not gay bakers and gay florists who are being sued and losing their businesses; it is Christians. It is not gay property owners and gay photographers who are being sued and losing their businesses; it is Christians. The fire chief of Atlanta wasn't fired by the city council because he was pro-gay; it was because he is a Christian who condemned homosexuality. The creator of Mozilla, the company that owns the Firefox Internet Browser, wasn't fired because he voted in favor of gay marriage; he was fired because he voted to define marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Christian orphanages all over America are not being shut down for letting gay couples adopt children; they are being shut

down because they believe every child deserves and needs a home with a married mom and dad.

8 BIBLICAL REASONS FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Now let's look at the issue from a Biblical perspective. Should a Christian baker have the freedom to decline to create a cake for a gay wedding? The following are eight biblical reasons for religious liberty. Not merely religious liberty for Christians, but for people of all faiths, even non-believers. These are eight reasons the Bible says that people must have the freedom of religion, as long as they are not harming anyone's life or property. Eight reasons the government must respect religious liberty.

1. The government must not be obeyed when it orders you to violate your moral or religious beliefs.

The Bible is very clear that conscience trumps the collective. The individual's conscience takes precedence over the state. There are several Biblical examples that we could turn to – Jonathan refusing to carry out his father's wishes to execute an innocent man; Daniel and his friends refusing to violate their religious dietary convictions; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow down and worship the idol; Daniel refusing to cease praying. But probably the clearest example is found in the book of Acts 5. The apostles were ordered by the Jewish government not to preach and teach about Jesus. But the apostles disobeyed their order, and when they were questioned said this: **Acts 5:29** "Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than people.'" That is a very clear statement that the will of God takes precedence over the will of the state. If God's will and the will of state conflict, the individual must choose God, even at the risk of losing your life. Because people of faith must choose God over government, the government must give people the freedom to do so. It's important to remember that when people of faith disobey the government because of their religious beliefs, they are not rebelling against the government, they are obeying their God. Their goal is not to see the downfall of the state; their goal is to be obedient to God. Christians are typically the most patriotic citizens in the United States. They love their country and often give their lives for their country. They are lovers of law and order and are law-abiding citizens. When Christians disobey the government, it is not because they are enemies of the state, but because the state has become an enemy of God.

2. The government is God's servant, and therefore must not prevent people from doing God's will.

Romans 13:1-7 is a very important passage about the purpose of government and the responsibilities of Christian citizens. Verse 1 says that Christians must submit to the government. Christians must obey the law. They must pay taxes. As we just saw, the only time

disobedience to the state is allowed is when the law conflicts with the Bible. However, this passage also says that the government is God's servant. **Romans 13:4** "For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong." The Bible refers to the government as God's servant. If the government is God's servant, then it must not stand in the way of people doing God's will. It must not order people to disobey God. Otherwise it would cease to be God's servant.

3. The government is not God, and therefore it must not demand ultimate obedience.

We already looked Romans 13:4 where the government is called God's servant. Two verses later, verse 6, it says the same thing. **Romans 13:6** "And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks." If the government is God's servant, then that means that the government is not God. And if the government is not God, then it must not act like God. When does the government act like God? When it demands ultimate obedience. When the government orders you to subordinate your religion to your patriotism, then it has assumed the place of God in the life of its citizens. But the government is not God. It is God's servant, instituted by God to carry out His purposes.

4. The job of the government is to punish evildoers, not good people.

What is the job of the government? What is it supposed to do? The Bible doesn't say that the government is supposed to provide healthcare, or take care of the poor, or even provide free education. According to the Bible, the government has one essential job: Punish evildoers.

1 Peter 2:13-14 "13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority 14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good."

The government's job is to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. In the words of **Charles Colson**, "to preserve order, promote justice, and restrain evil." Therefore the government must not punish people good people like Jack Phillips, a man acting not out of animus, but on principle based on the Bible. He sincerely believes, as all Christians do, that his business belongs to God and must be run in a manner that is pleasing to God, and that God hates the sin of homosexuality. This is not an evil man that should be punished by the state. This is a good man who is suffering evil at the hands of the state.

5. The government is not the church, and therefore must not decide on matters of theology.

God has created three institutions to restrain evil and foster human flourishing. The first is marriage. The second is the government. And the third is the church. All three of these are God-ordained institutions, but they each have an important and different role in society. Marriage raises children to be good people. The church inspires virtuous behavior and devotion to God. The state maintains law and order. The church is not the government, and the government is not the church. Therefore, the government must not dabble in the areas of theology. It is not the government's place to decide which religious beliefs are orthodox, and which are heterodox.

Romans 13:4 "For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong."

The government's God-given role is to carry the sword in order to restrain evil. The church does not carry the sword. The church proclaims the gospel. The government must stay in its lane.

It may be tempting for a Congressman or a judge or a government official to say of Jack Phillips, "His beliefs are not Biblical. His beliefs don't actually reflect the heart and teachings of Christ. So his religion is not valid. It is not good. Therefore he should not be given the freedom to act in accordance with his beliefs." In other words, it may be tempting for government officials to restrict religious liberty when they don't agree with certain religious expressions. But the government is not the church. It is not the government's place to decide on matters of religious belief. Certainly the government must make decisions on morality, on how people should treat one another, but in the event that a citizen's religious exercise is not threatening anyone else's health or property, then the government must not interfere. To do so would be an overreach of government authority.

6. The government cannot effectively suppress religion.

A sixth reason that the government must respect religious liberty is that the government cannot effectively suppress religion. It should not try to do so, but even if it tried, it would fail. This has been seen all through history.

The Babylonians and the Greeks tried to wipe out Judaism, but Judaism remains while the Babylonian and Greek empires are no longer. The Romans, the French, and the Communists tried to wipe out Christianity, but Christianity eventually conquered all three. In fact, today there are more Christians in China than members of the Communist party. The Protestants and Catholics in Europe tried to wipe each other out after the Protestant Reformation but failed. All through history people have tried to suppress religion, and it has never worked. The only thing that happens is that harmless people, virtuous people, and often very patriotic people are

persecuted and driven underground to worship in the shadows. The government can destroy a church building, but it cannot destroy the church. It can take away a man's home, but it cannot take away his faith. The government can put man in chains, but it cannot not chain the gospel. If the government cannot stop people from buying and selling drugs, then it surely cannot stop people from obeying their God. All it can do is turn innocent and harmless people – its very best citizens – into enemies of the state.

I'm reminded of the famous story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three devout Jews who were living in exile in Babylon. The king gave the order for every citizen to blow down and worship his gold statue, but the Jewish men refused. When the king threatened to burn them alive if they continue to disobey, they did not flinch. The king asked, "What god is going to save you from my power?" Their answer is inspiring. **Daniel 3:16-18** "16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, 'Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. 17 If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. 18 But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.'" The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shows that the government, no matter how much power it has, no matter how harsh it is, cannot effectively suppress religion.

Therefore, the government only has one logical choice. Rather than trying to suppress religion, it must recognize and respect religious liberty except when one citizen is threatening the health or property of another citizen. For example, the government cannot allow the religious exercise of child sacrifice.

7. The marks of a good government are freedom from disturbance, and the freedom of religion.

How can you tell when the government is effective? What are the marks of a good government? The Bible gives us two marks. **1 Timothy 2:1-2** "1 First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, explaining how to lead the church in Ephesus, where Timothy is the pastor. First, Paul says to Timothy, have the church pray for the government. How should we pray for the government? Pray that the government would operate in such a way that two things would result.

First, that the citizens would be able to live in tranquility and quietness. In other words, that the citizens would be free from disturbance. There are two kinds of disturbance that people need freedom from. First, the disturbance of evil people, both domestic and foreign, who would threaten their lives and property. This is why we need government in the first place. People are sinful, and if you eliminate the government, the strong would prey on the weak. Evil

people would run wild. So a good government has an effective police and military. It is able to preserve order and enforce the law. As one person put it, the mark of an effective government is that a woman can walk down the street alone at night. The mark of an effective government is that parents can let their children roam the neighborhood without fearing that they might be abducted. Second, people also need freedom from the disturbance of the government. People need to protection from a tyrannical government that would violate their God-given rights and threaten their lives and property. This is why the government must also be limited. On the one hand, a government is necessary to protect us from the disturbance of evil people. On the other hand, the government must be limited in its power so that it does not become a disturbance to its citizens. President **James Madison**, the primary architect of the United States Constitution said, "The first task of government is to create order and secure rights and liberty. And then, the second task is to restrain the governors." So the first mark of a good government is that its citizens are free from disturbance. Evil people are not endangering them, and the government is not interfering with their pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

The second mark of an effective government is that the citizens would be able to live in all godliness and dignity. In other words, that the citizens have the freedom of religion. The ultimate purpose of mankind is to love and serve God, and the government must not interfere. The founders of our country understood this, which is why religious liberty is the very first right protected in the constitution. Not merely the freedom to believe or to worship, but the free exercise of religion. The freedom to live out the tenets of your faith at home, at church, in the marketplace, and in public.

If the mark of a good, effective government is freedom from disturbance, and freedom of religion, then it follows that the government must protect religious liberty.

8. The government needs a thriving church.

The final reason that the government must respect religious liberty is that the government needs a thriving church. For people to live in freedom, they have to be virtuous. They have to be responsible for themselves, and respectful of each other. As virtue decreases, government control must increase. If people use their freedom for evil, then society breaks down, and the government must become totalitarian. If people do not control themselves, then the government must control them. Virtue is required for freedom.

The book of Proverbs stresses over and over again that virtue, moral excellence, is what makes a city, a state, a nation, strong. **Proverbs 11:11** "A city is built up by the blessing of the upright, but it is torn down by the mouth of the wicked."

But how do you create a virtuous populace? How do you foster and cultivate virtue among the citizens? The most effective way is through religion, specifically the Christian religion. The

church teaches people to be moral and virtuous. It commands parents to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. And it gives people an internal motivation for doing so. Religious people do not need to be controlled by the state to do the right thing; they do the right thing out of love and duty to God.

So freedom requires virtue, and virtue, on a mass scale, requires religion. This is why the government needs a thriving church. When the church thrives, then the people become more virtuous. And as the people become more virtuous, the demand for government intervention and control lessens, and freedom reigns.

For this reason, the government must respect the freedom of religion. Not only that, but the government would be wise to encourage religious participation. For the strengthening of the church leads to the strengthening of our nation.

So the Bible strongly supports and demands that the government respect the freedom of religion. Not just for the Christian religion, but for all religions. Because if the government has the power to suppress one religion, then it has the power to suppress all religion. The question is not whether or not Jack should bake the cake; the question is whether Jack should have the freedom to refuse to bake the cake in deference to his religion. And the answer, Biblically, is yes.

HOW TO CONTEND FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

How can you and I get involved in the fight for religious liberty. Make no mistake, you can make a difference.

1. Understand religious liberty.

The definition of religious liberty is found in the first amendment of the Constitution. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Notice two things. First, the freedom of religion is not the freedom merely to believe or to worship, but to exercise your religion. In other words, the freedom of religion is not restricted to your home and your church. It involves the freedom to exercise your religion wherever you go. Second, notice that the words "separation of church and state" are absent. Those words are not in the Constitution. They are found in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson. The purpose of the First Amendment was not to keep government and religion separate, but to prevent the government from forcing religion, or punishing religion.

2. Get to know the teams.

There are two primary political teams right now in America, the Republicans and the Democrats. The Republicans are for religious liberty, and the Democrats support the LGBT activists. I'm not telling you how to vote, but just know that if you vote for a Democrat, you are voting against religious liberty. You are voting to force Jack Phillips to bake the cake.

3. Recognize the enemy's weapons.

How are opponents of religious liberty fighting? They have two weapons. First, their goal is to appoint liberal judges who can legislate from the bench. Instead of interpreting the law, these judges will impose their will on the country and try to force everyone to comply with the sexual revolution.

Second, the enemies of religious liberty are using the weapon of SOGIs – Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Laws. All over the country they are seeking to pass laws, on both the city, state, and federal levels, that give special protections to gays and transgenders. Not equal protection, but special protection. For example, a gay baker would be free to refuse to make an anti-gay cake, but a Christian baker would not be free to refuse to make a gay wedding cake. So it's not about equality; it's about special right and the suppression of dissent.

4. Vote for religious liberty.

The most important thing you can do in the fight for religious liberty is to vote. How? Vote for politicians who are for religious liberty. These politicians will reject SOGIs, and they will appoint conservative judges. They will also pass legislation to protect people of faith.

5. Pray.

We already read in 1 Timothy 2:1 how Paul commanded Timothy and the church in Ephesus to pray for the government. We must pray for religious liberty to be preserved and restored. We must pray for conservative politicians and judges to gain power.

6. Give.

Finally, you can get in the fight for religious liberty by donating to organizations like Alliance Defending Freedom, a non-profit law firm that specializes in defending people like Jack Phillips in the fight for religious liberty. And you can do that by donating to our Christmas Offering.

CONCLUSION

Make no mistake. This issue is highly relevant to you. Religious liberty is under attack in America like never before. And it may not touch you today, but if the opposition continues to

gain ground, it will touch you eventually. When you hear the stories of people like Jack Phillips who are being persecuted for their faith in America, you should feel something. You should feel threatened. You should feel a sense of urgency to act and to get involved and to speak out.

Let me quote with the words of **Tony Perkins**, the president of the Family Research Council. “A government able to bankrupt people for standing by their beliefs, on marriage, life, or any other matter of conscience, is a government of unbridled power and a threat to everyone's freedom.”