

AMERICAN PASTORS NETWORK

2026 Liberty Sunday • Sunday, July 5th 2026

SAMPLE SERMON

MESSAGE: *“Faithful in Freedom: Living for Christ in a Contested Culture”*

TEXT: Acts 4:13–22; Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17; Daniel 3 & 6

AIM: Religious liberty is a gift—but our ultimate calling is not to preserve freedom at all costs, but to **faithfully obey Christ regardless of the cost.**

INTRODUCTION: As we again take time to acknowledge the privileges and benefits of living in the United States of America, we must also be mindful that what we enjoy must be protected and stewarded. It is a miracle that our nation and its constitutional republic have lasted 250 years. The University of Illinois researched other nations with a similar constitutional form of government and discovered that, on average, they lasted 17.8 years. One of the reasons we believe our nation has been afforded such longevity and durability is that, from its inception, it honored God. Our motto is *“In God We Trust.”* Now, many debate whether we are a *“Christian Nation,”* but the fact is, our spiritual and religious foundation must account for some measure of our success. We would be foolish to discount it or attempt to erase it from our history.

Yet in 2026, we find ourselves again facing threats regarding **religious liberty** and the **freedom to exercise our faith**, and even more so, to express our faith in the marketplace of ideas. Not that we seek a superior position at the table of governance, but we desire to be treated as the founders who believed that we have value and should be respected and free to make our beliefs known.

However, more and more we see, through courts, laws, regulations, and subjective decisions by those in power attempts to silence us, remove us, or even punish us for our beliefs. This should not and cannot happen.

Yet we walk a narrow path as Christians. We have a right to make our voices heard and should not feel ashamed to exercise those rights. But we also recognize that we may at times be persecuted for our faith, as happens around the globe. However, we live in America, and until the Constitution is discarded and replaced, we should stand for our religious liberties.

Why is this important? We are seeing religious liberty challenged in academia, businesses, families, and nearly every area of life. We must know how to respond and what we are called to do.

So, for this **Liberty Sunday**, we will explore the Scriptures to gain insight into how believers should view this issue—and how we should respond.

TRANSITION

We will look at several passages today, but to set the tone, let's read Acts 4. Peter and John had been ministering in the name of Jesus, and the opposition sought to silence them. Consider how they responded and the attitude they displayed.

Acts 4:13–22

[13] Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. [14] But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. [15] But when they had commanded them to leave the council,

they conferred with one another, [16] saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. [17] But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” [18] So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. [19] But Peter and John answered them, **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, [20] for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”** [21] And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. [22] For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. (ESV)

Peter and John refused to be silenced, yet they were also willing to pay the price. That reality must remain in the back of our minds, regardless of what the laws of our land permit or restrict. With that in mind...

BOOK: FIVE KEYS TO UNDERSTAND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

I. Religious Liberty Is a Gift from God (But Not Guaranteed)

Key Scripture: Matthew 22:21

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Teaching Points:

- God ordains government for order (Romans 13)
- Freedom of religion in the United States is historically unique and worth stewarding
- Scripture never promises political freedom—only spiritual freedom

Illustration:

- Early church thrived under persecution, not protection

Application:

- Be grateful, not entitled
- Pray for leaders and laws that allow peaceful worship
- Be respectful of the laws and governmental expectations

ILLUSTRATION: As a pastor, when our church was looking at different pieces of property to purchase to build on, we knew we were going to deal with government entities to get approvals. Before purchasing and to avoid a battle, we would go to the government officials first and ask them either what properties they were “OK” with prior to purchasing or “if we bought this” would they have a problem. Our humble deference towards them and understanding that us purchasing property meant it would come off the tax rolls and it would lose money, went a long way for them to respect our religious liberties and work with us.

II. God’s Authority Always Overrides Human Authority

Key Scripture: Acts 4:19–20

“We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

Teaching Points:

- When laws conflict with God’s commands, obedience to God is non-negotiable
- Biblical examples:
 - Daniel refused to stop praying (Daniel 6)
 - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow (Daniel 3)

Modern Connection:

- Legal tensions in cases like 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis reflect this ongoing question:
Can you be forced to act against your convictions?

Application:

- Set convictions **before** you’re tested
- Teach your family where you stand

- When given the opportunity, explain to government officials (especially non-believers) what drives you and why you believe like you do.

ILLUSTRATION: Each year our church would have a *Civil Government Sunday* and invite elected officials to worship with us. We would honor them, show appreciation and they would get to engage with potential voters. As part of the service that day, I would always speak on an issue in the news and being debated politically from the Bible. I would often say, “I know you may not BELIEVE as we do, we accept that. However, as one of your constituents, we would hope that you would recognize and respect that our faith and more specifically, our commitment to the truth of God’s word, as an authority in our lives, demands we believe the way we do.” It gave them a window into why we land on issues.

III. Religious Freedom Includes the Right to Live Out Your Faith Publicly

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:15–16

“Live as people who are free... living as servants of God.”

Teaching Points:

- Faith is not meant to be private only—it’s public
- Includes:
 - Speech
 - Work
 - Ethics
 - Witness

Modern Connection:

- Workplace and public-life tensions (e.g., *Groff v. DeJoy*) show this battle is about **living**, not just believing
- A Supreme Court decision to allowing a bakery to decline making a cake for a same-sex wedding.
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Application:

- Don't compartmentalize your faith
- Represent Christ with both truth and grace

ILLUSTRATION: There was a State House bill written that would have demanded that public bathrooms be accessible to either "gender" and churches were included. I reached out to our representative, who happened to be a co-sponsor of the bill and asked to have coffee to discuss the matter. When we met, I brought with me a number of other pastors and in a closed door meeting explained why this was morally, practically, physically and spiritually wrong. Among the pastors was a young man who shared his personal story of being molested at a young age by a man. No promises were made, but he listened. Two weeks later the representative pulled the bill off the floor of the House and it died a legislative death. Here was a case when using our voices and speaking up made a huge difference.

IV. Expect Pressure—But Respond with Christlike Character

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:17

"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

Teaching Points:

- Cultural pressure is not new—it's normal
- Christians are called to:
 - Respect authority
 - Love opponents
 - Stand firm without hostility

Modern Reality:

- Issues around gender, speech, and conscience are increasing pressure points
- The temptation is either:
 - Compromise truth
 - Or respond harshly

Application:

- Speak truth **without losing your witness**
- Courage + kindness must go together

ILLUSRATION: In January, right after Christmas, a young family came to me and shared that they just discovered that days before the holiday break, their five-year-old child was subject to listening to their teacher read an inappropriate book in class about a transgender child. Days after they read the book, they sent home a note telling parents what they did, obviously to cover their actions. The parents were outraged and I offered to help and reached out to the school superintendent who I knew. When I discussed with him what happened, it was clear that he knew what had occurred and had hoped that it would go unnoticed, thus avoiding the issue of parental rights and authority. Having no assurance that something would be fixed, I spoke to some school board members, who were unaware and sympathetic, but also too fearful to do anything. I then decided to attend a school board meeting and make public comment, which opened “Pandora’s Box” and caused a community stir, once the facts were in the open. Nevertheless, in the days to follow, the local newspaper took me to task, calling me homophobic and putting me in the camp of hate speech. Obviously my church family were conflicted, agreeing with me, but now having to defend me with many of their friends. It was the right thing to do, but in the end I paid a dear price for it.

V. Our Ultimate Hope Is Not in Laws or Stated Religious Liberties—but in Christ

Key Scripture: Philippians 3:20

“Our citizenship is in heaven...”

Teaching Points:

- Laws change, courts shift, culture moves
- Christ’s kingdom does not
- The church grows strongest when it depends on God, not government

Illustration:

- The gospel has advanced in hostile environments throughout history

Application:

- Don't anchor your faith to political outcomes
- Anchor it to Christ's unchanging reign

In 2010, I was invited to prayer at the start of a legislative day in the State House of Representatives. There were a lot of issues being dealt with that were very troubling and a Biblical voice needed to be heard. I wrote my prayer carefully addressing those issues and prophetically calling on our politicians not to dishonor God and His word. Many agreed but many were enraged. The local news picked up the story and I agreed to an interview with one stipulation, they had to print my prayer word for word with any article about me. They did and even though they tried to paint me in a poor light, the prayer was there for all to read for themselves. About two weeks after the incident, I took my car in for service at my mechanic and as I was paying my bill I saw my prayer taped on the wall of the lobby. When I asked about it, my mechanic, who was not religious, said he agreed with everything that was said and he was 100% in my corner! What an affirmation that stating for the truth and Biblical values in the public square was so important and it touched people!

Conclusion: A Call to Faithfulness

SO, WHAT:

- While we have religious liberty, we must strive to protect it and thus allow God's truth to be free to be heard.
- If religious freedom decreased, would your faith remain strong? We should stand firm no matter what occurs around us!
- Religious freedom is all about promoting and expanding the reach of the gospel. Are you using your current freedom to boldly share the gospel?
- Will you re-commit yourself to stand up for religious liberty and freedom, but also be willing to pay the price, even if the tide of public opinion continues to turn against Christ-followers and the Biblical truths we hold dear?

Additional Illustrations:

<https://www.foxnews.com/sports/vermont-pays-566k-damages-christian-school-banned-sports-competitions-years>

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/record-antisemitic-incidents-canada-fuel-criticism-carney-government-response>