A Gracious Citizen

## Grace for The Family

## By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** 1 Timothy 2:1-8

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### Faith Church

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Recently I've been reading a series of books on World War II by Rick Atkinson. It's called "The Liberation Trilogy" and I would highly recommend it to you if you like this kind of reading. I've always been drawn to this period of our nation's history because of the incredible sacrifices made by just so many American men and women on foreign soil. Nobody here today is glorifying war. We're not here to worship our country. We're not here to suggest that everything that our nation has always done is right. I also understand there are going to be a number of people who will attend our services today from other countries and we want it to be that way, however, it's been mentioned already and will be mentioned several times yet this morning: God calls upon us in places like Romans 13 to give honor to whom honor is due and there is such a thing as just war and no one can reasonably say that the United States, at least in modern times, has used military conflict as some sort of an aggressive stance for the purpose of gaining more territory or subjugating other people. We seek to be engaged only if it is a just war.

It came up several times when I was in Albania a few weeks ago. I mentioned several times now that Albania was under Turkish control for over 500 years. In fact, going backwards for a minute, one of the ways you can tell if a person is truly Albanian is simply to ask them one question, "Who is your nation's hero?" Now, in our country, you could have several different people that might be the answer to that question. Not in Albania. Name your countries hero. If they can't do that, they are not from Albania because the answer is Skanderbeg or George Kastrioti and the reason he is their hero is that back in the 1400s he held off the invading Turks for over 25 years in a series of epic battles that found them significantly outnumbered. The people that hosted me actually took me to the famous castle where some of those epic battles occurred and when you study the history and then you stand in that place, it just takes your breath away. In fact, Skanderbeg is credited from stealing or stalling Muslim oppression not just in Albania but in other parts of Europe which prevented other places in Europe from being overtaken by the Turks. After Skanderbeg's death, the country was conquered by the Turks who remained in control for the next 500 years. Well, that ended after World War I which is where the US comes into play.

I was told by several different sources that Albanians love the US for 2 reasons. It was amazing how many times I heard this exact same story. Two reasons: one is our president Woodrow Wilson which totally shocked me. I mean, it totally shocked me but when Europe was being carved up by the victors after World War I, there was a desire on the part of some to divide up Albania. In other words, they would go from Turkish oppression to being dominated by some other foreign power. That's when President Wilson stood up and argued for and perhaps demanded sovereignty and independence for the Albanian people. In fact, in the capital where I stayed, there was a huge statue of Woodrow Wilson. The park that I ran in every day when I was there is called Wilson Park. You see his name everywhere. What they said was, there's a powerful nation using its influence in a just way. They weren't just grabbing land and resources for themselves. They were standing up for a weaker nation with absolutely no expectation of receiving anything in return. The result of a just nation operating after a just war.

The second reason Albanians love the US is when NATO stepped in and bombed Serbia to stop their ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Albanians understand that often when NATO acts militarily it's primarily led and funded by the US. Well, many of the residents of Kosovo are native Albanians and they view the US actions as, again, using our influence to stand up for those who are weak and unable to defend themselves. Those are just 2 of many examples we could give of what would be considered a just war of the government functioning as Paul commanded in Romans 13 that it is to be "a minister of God for you for good but if you do it as evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword. It does not bear the sword for nothing for it is a minister of God." Second time in the text, a minister of God. An avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Now, any government that chooses to do that has to use men and women to accomplish their purposes, men and women who are even willing to die for that nation which brings us back to Atkinson's trilogy on World War II. One point he makes in several places is that the young Americans were not automatically fierce fighters because it was inconsistent with the Christian upbringing that many of them had been exposed to in various ways and various degrees. But Atkinson argues in this trilogy that what transformed these young men and women, many of them barely out of high school, into the effective fighting force that they became was a growing commitment that President Roosevelt's 4 freedoms. Do you know what they are? The freedom of speech. The freedom of religion. The freedom from want. And the freedom from fear. That too struck me forcefully when I was in Albania because I had several occasions to look out across the Adriatic Sea and think about what it was like for the allies to fight the Axis armies in Italy as a means of stopping Nazi aggression and oppression at the hand of Adolf Hitler. Many American men and women died seeking to liberate Italy.

Again, Scripture calls upon us to give honor to whom honor is due and it's right for us to honor people who have gone before us and who live among us who sacrificed and in some cases paid the ultimate sacrifice because of their commitment to provide others with the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion and freedom from want and the freedom from fear. Here's today's message in a nutshell: followers of Jesus Christ are thankful for those freedoms and followers of Jesus Christ cherish those freedoms and followers of Jesus Christ will stand for those freedoms and followers of Jesus Christ want to use those freedoms in a way that is consistent with what we are taught in the word of our God.

With that in mind, open your Bible please, to 1 Timothy 2. That's on page 162 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. So in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 2, page 162 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. Our annual theme this year is "Finding Grace." Finding grace from this great text in Hebrews 4, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Well, in conjunction with Memorial Day weekend this morning, I want to think about what it means to be a gracious citizen. A gracious citizen. For the past several Sundays, in fact, we're concluding this series today. We've been talking about "Grace for the Family," well, in all of our homes we are living out particular views of the government and we're raising future adults who will have many opportunities and many responsibilities including how they relate to the government authorities over them and my job is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, is that right? That's why I'm here, to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry and so it's important that from time to time I help us think through this area from the perspective of God's word along with everything else that Scripture discusses.

Now, let me just say before we jump into this text: one of the challenges that pastors face these days is how much attention should we give to this topic of trying to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry in a relationship with government. There is no question that in our country, in our state, even in our community, the topic of religious freedom can bring out intense emotion and fierce debate. It's amazing. We saw that several years ago when we were going through the public approval process with Faith West. I mean, a seemingly calm community came alive with passion and in some cases I believe what could reasonably be called irrational animus toward us simply because we're a Bible believing church. Where even members of the elected city Council in a meeting, remember, that had to be moved to the local public high school auditorium to accommodate the expected crowds and where, believe it or not, the police and the firemen were brought in to control any violence or outburst that might occur, to the point that our church offered to host and to pay for an ice cream social in the parking lot after the event regardless of the outcome of the vote because we wanted to make the point that neighbors can love one another in spite of our disagreements and the city officials denied that request because they could not guarantee everybody's safety. At that meeting, several members of the elected city council publicly and forcefully condemned and in some cases ridiculed this church because of our beliefs, they said, of human origins that concerned them that we believed in what Scripture says about that. And others mentioned publicly their condemnation and concern of our view of biblical counseling. Others talked about the role of men and women in the family and the church and what we understand Scripture to teach about that. And of course, of course, of course, over and over and over, our biblical view of human sexuality. And the argument was clear: several members of the West Lafayette city council voted to discriminate against us purely on the basis of our religious beliefs. That's what happened in otherwise calm, serene, enlightened, tolerant West Lafayette, Indiana. There is no other way to tell that story.

What occurred in the state of Indiana of this year over the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was completely outrageous. It just was. The legislation is already in place in 30 different states in one form or another. It doesn't legalize discrimination against anybody, it simply acknowledges that sometimes 2 parties each come to the table with a set of competing rights and therefore a framework was established that before the government stepped in and encroached on someone's religious freedom, the government had to demonstrate that it had a compelling interest to do so and that it was exercising that interest in the least restrictive way possible. And to say that the progressives came unglued around the country would be an understatement, like many who had obviously not even read the law or had little to no understanding of how the law actually works. So our legislature quickly enacted a so-called fix that some legal experts believe did more harm than good. So on the front page again today and yes, I was asked multiple times this week to participate in that story and I for a number of reasons respectably declined. We could give plenty of examples on the national or even the international level.

So again, the point I'm making is: pastors have to decide how much time to give that on Sundays and you may have noticed my answer is to give very little. Very little. At best, such issues are the 88th note on our piano. We're not a political action committee. Our focus is on living and proclaiming the Gospel. However, if we don't touch on these things from time to time, I'm failing my responsibility that I just mentioned a moment ago to equip the saints, to minister in every area of life including this one that is obviously very important to many people in our community and in our country. What I want you to know this morning, I believe at least, I hope you do too, that if other people who went before us were willing to die for these freedoms, surely the church of Jesus Christ ought to want to take the time to understand and then live for them. So rarely but occasionally over the next 18 months, I do plan to take a few opportunities to help our church family process these matters.

Now, thankfully the word of God is sufficient. Are you glad for that? And it helps us think about every area of life just like it promises to so let's read this great text and look for 3 desired freedoms for every follower of Jesus Christ. I'm in 1 Timothy 2, beginning in verse 1. "First of all," Paul says, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority." Now, notice the purpose clause. This is crucial to understanding this text, "so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." You have to understand that. "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension."

We're talking this morning about a gracious citizen and what are 3 desired freedoms from this passage for every follower of Jesus Christ? Well, the first one is the freedom to pray for our government. Now, please keep in mind that we always seek to interpret the word of God in its historical context. Understand, the governmental leaders under which the early church lived were far worse than anything any of us has ever had to face so regardless of our legitimate concerns, we ought to be very, very thankful people because of what has been provided by our God through the sacrifice of men and women we're honoring today. But even in that culture, even in that culture with the governmental leaders they had to endure, Paul calls upon the people of God to pray. To pray in a variety of ways. Entreaties, he says, prayer that arises out of a sense of need. They had it and so do we.

Then just the general word prayer, carrying with it a unique element of worship and reverence. And petitions, a beautiful word which means to fall in with someone. A word that talks about advocacy, empathy, compassion. Remember, we're talking about praying for our government. Compassion and involvement. Then the word thanksgiving, a spirit of gratitude. Every one of us this morning would do well to consider how faithful we are to pray for all men and especially today from this text, for our elected leaders. For their families. For their personal lives. For their decisions. It's not easy to be a governmental official and our willingness to pray for them is one way that we acknowledge that fact. I'm glad I know of several different people and several different organizations who ask local and state and national leaders on a regular races for specific prayer requests because we want to walk out the particular instructions in this text in a way that helps us relate to our leaders biblically.

Now, let me also point this out from this text: there is a significant difference between praying on behalf of all men as the passage says or just praying for ourselves. You realize ultimately this is an evangelistic passage and the "all men," you saw the way the text ends up, is much broader than the category of just kings or, in our case, governmental leaders in verse 2. But the challenging question here is not only whether we pray for our elected officials but whether we pray on their behalf. It would be interesting if we were able to run everyone here through some kind of an olive press type machine this morning, not a real pleasant thought I realize, but wring out all of our thoughts and all of our words and all of our actions regarding the government this morning and then make 2 piles. One for all the prayer offered on behalf of our government and the other for all the criticism and the complaints and then compare the size of the 2 piles. You see, if we say we appreciate the sacrifices of those who have gone before us and the freedoms that those sacrifices provided, the question then becomes: are we using those freedoms, including the freedom of worship and the freedom of speech, to follow what God's word commands us to do in a text like this? And when we connect that to the ultimate sacrifice that had to be made in order that prayer would be possible highlighted later in the text that we have "one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all." Perhaps we could agree this morning we should probably pray more and complain less. Could I get a "yeah." I'm not talking about you but that person sitting next to you, they need you to give them an okay.

Now, please think about this, this is very important I think: what is the relationship between prayer and being a gracious citizen? You see, finding grace all year long including finding grace for the way we function in the culture in which we have been placed, what is the relationship between praying for all men and our being gracious? We could spend the rest of the morning on that. Let me just for the sake of time, here's a couple of answers. 1. It reminds us of the sovereignty of the Lord. How are we instructed in Matthew 6? Pray that in this way, "Our Father who is in heaven." Not some president. "Our Father who is in heaven. Hallowed be Your name." Or this crucial text, Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like channels of water in," what? "The hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." And I would suggest the more we pray to our sovereign God for our government and about our government, the wiser we will be in the way we speak about and relate to the actions and the decisions of our government. Our sovereign God allowed that. It also helps us submit our will to his. The Lord's prayer goes on and says, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," even if that's different than what I would want if I was in charge. Submitting ourselves to God's sovereignty.

I want to be very careful how I say this this morning but I think God's will for the United States may be to experience his wrath as a culture that has strayed further away from him than ever. When I say wrath, I'm saying wrath in a Romans 1 sense of him giving us up. Let me tell you the last words you ever want said about you, "God gave you up," meaning in that text, removing his restraining hand from man's full expression of our sinful desires. And I don't say that because I'm angry. Do I look angry to you? Look, I'm going to a picnic this afternoon and I'm going to eat brauts until they squirt out my ears. I'm not angry. I don't know where that came from. I'm not depressed. I'm so energized for a lot of reasons that we just don't have time to get into this morning about ministry and about our church's position in all of this. But nobody knows God's will for the future of our country. We do know eschatologically that the world is going to get worse and worse from a moral and spiritual perspective. "In the last days, perilous times shall come." So I'm suggesting that regularly affirming his sovereign hand in our prayers results in citizenly graciousness.

Now, this passage also explains the purpose of such prayers. What are we asking the Lord and to the degree that we can, what are we asking and maybe even expecting our government to provide for us? Well, the answer is: the freedom to live out our beliefs in every area of life. That is a crucial statement in a way that is not needlessly controversial. You see, note carefully the purpose clause in this text, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority," now slow down, "so that," note this, "so that we may lead a," what? "Tranquil and quiet life in," what? "In all godliness and dignity." That's crucial. This concept, by the way, is repeated in Paul's next letter to Timothy. "The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome." Oh, that verse trips me up from time to time. How about you? "The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them," the sovereign God, "God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." So we're not political junkies. We're not constantly looking for a fight. We aren't out there making threats and imposing our beliefs on others. We don't want to be needlessly controversial.

Also, in a way that is consistent with our understanding of Scripture, please note that in your heart and mind: this phrase "in all godliness and dignity" is a crucial part of the discussion. Now, please think through all this logically now. I understand it's a holiday weekend and now some of you, all you've got on your brain is brauts. I shouldn't have even brought it up. Oh, I love them. But let's think through this logically here. It's not our desire to judge the world. Do you understand that? I've mentioned this passage several times this year, this is from 1 Corinthians 5 in connection with the terrible presence of the incestuous man in the Corinthian church and Paul says, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother," you don't want that inside the church house, "a brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler - not even to eat with such a one." Here, listen to this, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders?" That's not our concern. "Do you not judge those who are within the church? Those who are outside God judges." In the church, "remove the wicked man from among yourselves."

Here's what that means: we have practically no interest in telling people outside the church of Jesus Christ how to live. That's just not our calling. The only reason we would have even a modicum of concern about that is because we live in a participatory democracy and in this culture, at least in certain cases, citizens have to determine moral standards and definitions. That's why I've always believed that the question of who should be allowed to be married should be a matter of public referendum because it's not first and foremost a question of rights. It's first and foremost a question of definition. Like Ireland just did this past weekend. You might say, "I didn't like the decision." That's not the point. I think at least the decision was made properly and if the Supreme Court acts as it is widely expected to next month and essentially legalizes gay marriage nationwide, think about that from a definition perspective. They have absolutely no moral reason not to legalize polygamy for the exact same argument. You see, if it's just a matter of rights, if it's just a matter of love is love as one Supreme Court justice suggested and some local officials like to say, well then fine. If that's all it is, well, then who are we to say that the love between 3 persons is any less valuable than the love between 2? And people used to say when I would bring that up that I am baiting. We are not baiting anymore. That sounds like mathematical intolerance to me. Legalized discrimination against those 3 persons. And let's just think about this: if nondiscrimination has now become our nation's highest value, we need to think carefully about where that road leads and I believe any world and life view in order to be valid and valuable, has to have the ability to falsify. In other words, you're saying this is right, well, then how do you say anything is wrong and on what moral or logical standard would you make that assertion? But still, that's not even close to our central concern. At best, those kind of discussions are the 88th note on our end of.

Now, the reason it even begins to matter to us is when a decision of our government places us in a position where we believe our participation would cause us to sin or our freedom to live out the implications of this text is in jeopardy for us. Think about this very carefully in light of the purpose clause of our prayer. What does it mean for us to be able to live a tranquil and quiet life in godliness and dignity? All we're asking for is the religious freedom not to be forced to displease our God. Perhaps this chart will help. We all have all kinds of people around us and all kinds of activities we're asked to participate in. Well, a lot of your life is spent with similar people and the things you are going to do together are acceptable. No problem there whatsoever. But we all go to work. We all live in a neighborhood. We all function in our culture and so, and it's good that we hang around with different people but not in a way that they would cause us to sin. They might be cussing their heads off, it doesn't mean we have to. They might be laughing and mocking all sorts of things, it doesn't mean they are forcing us to do it. They may be getting drop dead drunk, blah, blah, blah, but they are not forcing us to do that. So we're happy to be around all sorts of different people with different world and life views. We are not going to be quarrelsome. We're not picking a fight. And we're certainly not trying to impose our morality on anybody else. We're fine with that but sometimes here's the rub: sometimes we're around different people who are expecting us to do something that would be sin for us. It's not a matter of what might be sin for somebody else. They can answer to their God but the question before the house when it comes to religious freedom, when the question is before the house when it comes to what are we praying for, the answer is that we would never be in a position where we're being asked to sin against our God ourselves.

Well, what's required in those 3 categories? The first, nothing. The people I'm going to be hanging around with, hanging around people from our staff today, the staff picnic. It's going to be nothing but brauts, okay. Have I mentioned that already today? I mean, nothing is required there. What about when you're around different people? Well, you are tolerating some of the things that they might want to do that would not be your first choice but, again, they are not causing you to sin. However, however, when you're around different people and they want you to do something that would be a violation of your religious beliefs, then it's time for freedom. That's the only time that we even need religious freedom. The maturity to respect one another's viewpoints and to understand sometimes we can't do that. We're not going to do that. We have already selected our God. Not for you. We're not going to impose ourselves on you, but we have selected our God for ourselves. "For me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Now, apply that to the upcoming Supreme Court decision. By the way, I'm just giving you what I think about this. We're Baptists, okay? Individual soul liberty. You might believe differently than me on a lot of different things and still buy me a braut. It's fine. It may bother you to hear me say this but whether gay persons are allowed to marry in our secular culture is not a particularly strong concern of mine. I have my opinions on that and if given the opportunity to vote, I would do so on the basis of my moral authority just like everybody else in this state would do the same as well. But if the decision is what most people predict within the next 30 days, the challenge is many Christians are going to have some very hard decisions to make. You might say, "Are you talking about bakers or photographers?" Oh no, the issues are much larger than that.

Let me just give you some examples. You may have noticed that one of the persons who spoke up in favor of RFRA during the hearings in Indianapolis was Bill Katip. Bill Katip is the president of Grace College and Seminary up in Winona Lake from which I hold a degree. You might say, "Well, why in the world would they have a dog in this fight?" They've got a big dog in this fight because Grace College and Seminary was started to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ as articulated in the Christian Scriptures. We could say the same thing about places like Bethel, like Taylor, like Indiana Wesley, marvelous schools, many more like them around our state that have been a tremendous blessing to the people who live here and if nothing else, from a financial perspective, providing a generation of Hoosiers with excellent college degrees at no cost to the state. So even if you're a complete pagan, you have no commitment to anybody's religious freedom, you ought to value those Christian organizations whose sole existence is dependent on their ability to live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity.

Well, does that include their ability to hold their staff and faculty to employment standards based on their understanding of Scripture? How important is that? Very important. That freedom is at the heart of their mission so if one of their faculty members exercises what may soon be his constitutional right to marry a person of the same sex, could Grace College or whomever, dismiss that faculty member because his decision is inconsistent with the school's historic biblical position on marriage? Could they deny a candidate for employment for the exact same reason? And it's highly likely that faith-based schools that take such positions will face the wrath of the almighty government in ways that could very quickly bankrupt them. We'll see a accreditation teams become far more aggressive on this issue. Mark that down. And the loss of accreditation is a death blow to an institution of higher learning. The government could deny their students access to Pell grants. There is no loss of tax exempt status which means any gift to the institution would not be tax deductible to the donor. You might say, "Wont schools have some legal protection?" All of this is entirely uncharted waters.

We could make the same argument for Christian adoption agencies. Schools like ours. I hope you care about other people's religious freedom but if you want to just talk about it from the perspective of this site, schools like ours could eventually be impacted. And when you sit back and think about it, the list of potential challenges to Bible believing Christians is staggering. That's why I took the public stand I did in favor of RFRA and our culture demonstrated that they have very little concern for the religious freedom of our citizens. Think about the impact this could have on the Amish. Are you glad that we have the Amish in the state of Indiana? Does their history matter? Does their religious freedom matter to you? And I'm not going to get all wild about that this morning but there was a day when men would take up arms on this issue. Think about the impact to the German Baptists. I don't believe the average gay person wants to impose his or her values on others, I want to be sure I have said that. Many of them that I have met and become friends with would say the same things we would, "Just leave us alone. From a cultural perspective, leave us alone. Let us live in that way that is consistent with our beliefs and we'll be happy to let you do the same." But it only takes a few angry activists with a lot of time on their hands and money in their pockets to create a hornet's nest that could place Bible believing Christians in some very difficult positions.

You say, "Well, what should Christians do then?" Think about this logically now and I'm going to start from the other side. I hope you'll decide right now that you would never ask someone else to violate their religious conscience. So if somebody says, "What you're asking me to do right now would be a violation of what I believe religiously," I hope you would say, "I would immediately stop." For example and this is fairly well known, but you know that we have our biblical counseling training conference here every year and we decided many, many years ago that we would just outsource the printing of that conference notebook. Well, that's a big printing job. You need somebody who is really good at that and it's about a $30,000 body of work. Well, somebody came to me from our staff and said, "Hey, did you know that the company that we're using is led by a lesbian?" A person who is well known, I'm not speaking behind her back, it's well-known. To which I would say, and the staff member wasn't saying that was a bad thing. They just wanted to be sure that because of some of my public involvement that that did not catch me off guard. To which I said, "I couldn't care less about the person's sexual orientation." And you need to understand that. One of my gay friends recently taught me the word gaydar. I had never heard that before. I didn't even know what that meant and she had to explain that to me. It was the funniest conversation ever. I don't have that, okay? I don't think, "I wonder what their sexual orientation is?" Seriously? I wonder if they've got any brauts. I'm not worried about, I don't believe in judging people that way. Our concern is does she do a good job and she always has. Fabulous person.

What would happen, think about this, religious freedom. What would happen if she came to us and said, "You know I love this business relationship but I've been looking at one of these lectures that you all are asking me to print and honestly, for me to print that particular lecture on my equipment that I purchased to do business would violate my religious belief." What would we say then? I guess we could do this, we could fire that person. "Print it all or you're done." We could take her to the human relations commission on the basis of discriminating against us because of our religion. So we could fight the "you're discriminating against us" battle. Let me tell you exactly what Faith would do in that situation: we would say, "Fine, we're glad you have religious beliefs even though they might be dramatically different than ours and we respect your religious freedom. Take that particular lecture out. You can have the rest of the job. We'll have that lecture that is objectionable to you printed somewhere else and we we'll collate the notebooks ourselves," out of a respect for religious freedom for everyone.

So I'm encouraging you right now to never ask anybody to violate their religious beliefs and respect the fact that they've got some. I would also say, secondly, go as far as you can to serve someone else and only refuse when you are absolutely sure participating would cause you to sin. We're not going to get into the whole cake baker thing. I've gotten some flaming emails for my view on that. Which brings me to number 3: understand that others may draw lines differently than you. You see, don't judge other people for saying, "I can't," while somebody else would say, "I shouldn't." Understand Romans 14. People may draw lines differently than you.

But here's probably the bottom line that I think I need to say this morning: be prepared to suffer consequences for standing for truth. People are already facing stiff penalties for respectfully declining to be involved in certain activities and that is going to become nothing but worse. You say, "What would happen to a school like Grace College? Or what would happen to some of these other faith-based organizations if the government made them violate their biblical beliefs in something as centrally important as their employment standards?" Let me tell you the answer I think: many of them would close. Many of them would close before they would let the government force them to sin and the shameful thing is you're talking about property that was purchased by private money. You're talking about buildings that were built by private money. People who did that solely because that was going to be used to proclaim the Gospel as understood in the historic Christian scriptures and the fact that we are on the cusp of a position in our state where a school like that would be forced to either sin or close is absolutely outrageous.

Now, there's one more piece we need to add and that is in a way that promotes this freedom for everyone. It goes along to the printing illustration I used a moment ago. I would strongly encourage everybody in our church family to find some time and to study the life of Roger Williams. In fact, if I were king, everybody would have to spend 10 minutes this weekend doing that. Williams was one of the first champions of religious freedom in this country. Long before, by the way, the slave holding Thomas Jefferson began talking about it. Williams was a pastor who started the first church of a particular denomination in this country. Anybody want to guess the denomination? It was the first Baptist church. And what is instructive about Williams is he not only believed in freedom for himself but freedom for everybody which is why he argued vigorously for the freedom and rights of Native Americans. He actually learned several Indian dialects so that he could minister to them more effectively. He's also considered to be one of our nation's first abolitionists. So the question we need to mull is: are we praying for this freedom only for ourselves but also even for those who believe quite differently than us?

Now, this final freedom is where the text drives us and it explains why our church has adopted the mission statement that we have adopted, why we give so little time to anything else. We're really looking for the freedom to joyfully proclaim the Gospel. That's why Paul said, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension."

Here's what I hope we're about this summer: it doesn't matter what the Supreme Court decides, we've got the freedom to have vacation Bible school and baby, we're going to have it. We're going to have it bigger than ever. We're going to have it better than ever. You're going to see the word "Bible" pasted all over this town. Why? Because we've got the freedom to live it and we've got the freedom to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ that it contains and we are going to be all about that. When we have our community picnic, we're going to do everything that we can to live the Gospel and to joyfully proclaim the Gospel. You see, perhaps our greatest concern here shouldn't be whether some of our freedoms will be taken away but whether we are exercising the freedoms we already have.

CH Spurgeon said this, "One thing more, the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-axe, and your weapons of war, from the armory of sacred communion with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch His Spirit; you will be fired with the flame that burned in His breast, and consumed His life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when He saw it perishing; and if you cannot speak so eloquently as He did, yet shall there be about what you say somewhat of the same power which in Him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men. My dear hearers, specially you members of the church, I am always so anxious lest any of you should begin to lie upon your oars, and take things easy in the matters of God's kingdom. There are some of you—I bless you, and I bless God at the remembrance of you,—who are in season, and out of season, in earnest for winning souls, and you are the truly wise; but I fear there are others whose hands are slack, who are satisfied to let me preach, but do not themselves preach; who take these seats, and occupy these pews, and hope the cause goes well, but that is all they do." Friends, that would be offensive to the men and women who died to preserve our freedom of religion, huh? That would be offensive to our Savior who died to set men free.

You know, I’m glad for the many examples of using our religious freedom well. Perfect juxtaposition I think in the local paper today. You've got the front page, this article that I said I would not be involved in, people fussing about RFRA. You've got the next section, the USA Today, "Ireland Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage." That's the world in which we live but what do you have on page 3a? There you go, "Identity in Jesus Christ Defines Faith Christians Commencement." Exactly. Let us use our freedoms wisely.

Would you stand with me for prayer?

*Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to consider these matters and, Lord, I pray that you would help us not to be angry. Lord, help us to be invigorated as we think about the freedom that we certainly have and the joy of serving you our sovereign God. Lord, may we be busy about the task in these uncertain days we pray in Christ's name. Amen.*