

The Undermining of Religious Liberty in the USA

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | June 11, 2020



Did you notice that recent events in the United States took another step toward fulfillment of Bible prophecy? On Friday, May 29, 2020, the Supreme Court, in a 5-to-4 landmark ruling, set a new precedent that eroded our First Amendment freedom of religious practice.

In [**SOUTH BAY UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCH, ET AL. v. GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA**](#), the court ruled that the government may restrict religious practice. Specifically, the South Bay United Pentecostal Church challenged California's restrictions on attendance at worship services to no more than 25 percent of capacity, with a maximum attendance of 100 people.

John Roberts sided with the four liberal justices ruling that such restrictions are less restrictive than those placed on other public events, such as sporting events and concerts, and were, therefore, consistent with the First Amendment. The four conservative justices dissented, noting that religious practice has specific constitutional protections that the other public activities do not and, therefore, religious practice should stand apart and be held to a higher standard of protection than general events.

After this ruling, the Supreme Court refused to hear two other lawsuits brought by churches in Chicago, where the government ruled that religious attendance was restricted to 10 people. This means that the 10-person restriction stands.

Fallout

There are several significant points to note in this ruling.

First, a new precedent has been set that makes it constitutionally permissible for the government to set restrictions on religious practice. In this case, it was for the purpose of limiting the spread of COVID-19. But this ruling has changed the landscape, setting a new, low threshold to take away our freedoms. In the future, the government only needs a new reason to restrict religious practice. If it can be argued that the new restrictions are for the public good, and they do not single out or target religious practice, but are applied broadly to society at large, then this new standard will likely find such future restrictions constitutional. For instance, one could envision the call to limit carbon emissions, in order to prevent climate change, with a legislated national day of rest on Sunday to be an example of such law. The potential to restrict religious practice is now almost limitless.

Second, a few months ago, I wrote an [article](#) answering a question as to why some Christians supported Donald Trump as president. I suggested that one reason is that they see him as a bastion, a wall of protection, to protect against the erosion of our constitutional freedoms, including religious liberty, from the political left. Some scoffed and ridiculed the idea that our religious liberty could be eroded from the left, but that is exactly what has just happened.

I don't know the future - it is certainly possible that political conservatives may react to this latest Supreme Court ruling with more aggressive political action, seeking greater control of the branches of government to enact religious laws as their way of restoring religious freedom, but only end up restricting religious freedom; this is certainly a possibility. And if we see movements to legislate religious practice coming from the right, we should stand up for liberty.

But shouldn't we be just as vigilant to stand up to encroachments of religious liberty when they come from the political left?

So, the lesson is that we cannot rely on human governments, laws, or political parties to advance God's kingdom. At the end of the day, human systems use imposed laws and always end up restricting liberty to advance their cause, regardless of political persuasion.

We are certainly living in portentous times, when the culmination of the ages draws near. Regardless of your personal political leanings, remember that only God's methods and principles bring healing to hearts and minds. And one of those principles is liberty. So, I call on all of those who love God and His kingdom of love, from the political left and the political right, to join hands in support of freedom - freedom of conscience and freedom of religious practice - and reject all encroachments upon our liberties, whether from the left or the right.
