

feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

August 17, 2010

Dear Family,

It was a joy to share with you on the topic of religious liberty. In keeping with Stuart's motto for the summer series—"Think, baby, think"—I tried to offer some principles that would help us think biblically about religious liberty in our culture today. I addressed three basic questions:

1. Why should we, as Christians, care about religious liberty?

Some Christians say we shouldn't care about religious liberty because the Church flourishes under persecution—after all, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." But persecution is not an *intrinsic good*; it is an *evil* that God can cause to work for good (Rom 8:28; Gen 50:15). Scripture condemns persecution as an injustice that God will avenge (Rev 6:9-11), and urges us to pray for our leaders so that they will let us lead peaceful and quiet lives (1 Tim 2:1-4). (Voice of the Martyrs has an [excellent short essay](#) on this point.)

We should care about religious liberty because it is rooted in *the way that God created us* and *the way that God interacts with us*. How is religious liberty rooted in the way that God created us? God created us with a desire for transcendent truth and for relationship with Him (Ecc 3:11). He also created us with the capacity to seek the truth—by reason, conscience, and free will (Ac 17:26-27). But we cannot seek and embrace the truth under compulsion; we can only seek and embrace the truth authentically when we are permitted to do so freely. Thus, forcing someone to violate their conscience is wrong because it forces them to violate their created nature.

Religious liberty is also rooted in the way that God chooses to interact with us. God created Adam and Eve with the capacity to reject Him (which they did). And Jesus never compelled anyone to follow Him. (Jn 6:67; the betrayal of Judas). If God doesn't compel anyone to follow Him, how much less should government?

If religious liberty is rooted in the way that God created us and interacts with us, then it applies to people of all faiths—not just Christians. This is not because we're relativists, but because God Himself leaves people free to reject Him. Ultimately, we believe that allowing people to choose freely will open the door for more people to choose rightly; Christianity will flourish on a level playing field because Christianity is true. (For a concise teaching on this subject, see the Catholic Church's statement in [*Dignitatis Humanae*](#). For a very readable book, see [The Right to Be Wrong](#).)

2. What are the most significant threats to religious liberty in our culture today?

In my opinion, the top five threats to religious liberty in our culture today are (1) the gay rights movement; (2) the abortion and reproductive rights movement; (3) the idea that religious groups are "discriminating" when they require their employees or leaders to share their religious beliefs; (4) the idea that religious speech or arguments are unwelcome in the public square; and (5) overreaction against the spread of Islam.



The first two threats (gay rights and reproductive rights) involve a “clash” of liberties: gays and lesbians claim a right to be free from discrimination (or women claim a right to an abortion), while religious believers claim a right to be free from participating in conduct they believe is sinful (such as a Christian counselor who does not want to counsel a gay couple to preserve their relationship, or a Christian pharmacist who does not want to fill a prescription for a drug that causes an abortion). In this case, a sensible legal solution would be to protect *both* claims of right by allowing for *compromise*—for example, religious counselors or pharmacists should be allowed to refer patients or customers elsewhere for reasons of conscience, so long as the patient or customer is able to find the same services without undue hardship.

But, not surprisingly, groups that support gay rights and reproductive rights typically reject this sort of compromise. Their goal is not just equal rights or equal access to services, but total social acceptance of their behavior (Jn 3:19-20). They want a society where religious opposition to abortion or homosexual conduct is just as unacceptable as racial bigotry—and where the government can punish religious opposition accordingly. That is why these movements are a significant threat to religious liberty. (For a discussion of the other threats to religious liberty—such as how we can’t compromise on the issues of “religious discrimination,” and how the rights of Christians and Muslims stand or fall together—you’ll have to listen to the audio recording.)

3. How should we, as Christians, respond when our religious liberty is threatened?

I briefly offered eleven biblical principles for how we can respond when our religious liberty is threatened: **(1)** Remember that God is sovereign (Dan 4:17; Prov 21:1); **(2)** Remember those who are suffering for their faith (Heb 13:3); **(3)** Don’t be surprised when our religious liberty is threatened (Jn 15:20; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pe 4:12-14); **(4)** Don’t be afraid (Rev 2:10); **(5)** Be wise about what the threats really are (Mt 10:16); **(6)** Rejoice that we will be rewarded in heaven (Mt. 5:11-12); **(7)** Keep on doing good (1 Pe 4:19); **(8)** View persecution as an opportunity for our testimony (Lk 21:12-19); **(9)** Use our influence for good (Esther); **(10)** Assert our legal rights when needed (Ac 16:35-40; Ac 22:22-29; Ac 25:9-12); and **(11)** Engage in civil disobedience when necessary (Ex 1:15-17; Dan 3; Dan 6; Ac 4:18-20; Ac 5:29). Afterwards, I realized I should have listed a twelfth principle, which I only mentioned in passing: **(12)** Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44). This last principle is especially important when we face opposition from those who support gay rights and abortion rights.

In the midst of these threats and cultural controversies, it is wonderful to remember that we serve the risen Christ, who has won an eternal victory over all sin. In the context of religious liberty, that means we’re in a win-win situation. If we suffer a violation of our religious liberty, God is still sovereign and can bring good out of it; we have an opportunity for our testimony; and we can rejoice because our reward is great in heaven. But if our society protects religious liberty, our society is more just; we are free to be salt and light; and there is an open door for the spread of the Gospel—the one, true Gospel that will prevail for all eternity!

Thankful for our victory in Christ,
Luke

<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)

Announcements

BAPTISM SERVICE: We will be having a Baptism Service on Sep. 12th. Please contact the church office if you would like to be baptized!

FAMILY RETREAT: Mark your calendars for our annual family retreat, October 2-3! This is always a special time of fellowship and encouragement for those who are able to attend. Registration will begin in September.

MEN'S BREAKFAST: Our next breakfast will be on Aug. 28, 9-10:30am. Please Join us for a time of fellowship and encouragement. Childcare will be provided.

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY: Men, if you are interested in a summer-long study on the book of Romans, contact Brian Slusarz, 847-971-1172 or bslusarz@worldvision.org. The study takes place on Thursday nights, 7:30pm, at COSC.

WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB: Women, join us for our first Book Club meeting of the year, Monday, Sep. 13, 7pm. We will choose the 8 books that we will be reading and discussing and we want your input! RSVP to melsunuk@gmail.com and plan to bring and appetizer/dessert/drink.

RWANDA FUNDRAISER: "Groovin' for Rwanda" Friday, Aug. 20, 8-11pm at the North Hall at Eastern Market. Free basic swing and Texas two stepping lessons at 8pm, Band performs at 8:30. \$10 cash at the door will go to support the Church of the Resurrection mission trip to Rwanda and the *As We Forgive* Rwanda Initiative.

COSC BBQ'S: Please come and join us for our Sunday Summer BBQ fellowships after our church services in August! Each BBQ is sponsored by a member of COSC and will raise funds for a specific mission.

- **August 22nd**--In support of InterVarsity Fellowship
- **August 29th**--In support of Operation Mobilization (Hess family ministry in the Middle East)

Bulletin Board

*Postings not officially sanctioned by COSC.
Ads will be posted for up to 4 weeks. After that time period, please contact the church office to see if space will permit the ad to remain posted.*

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Oct. 1st. 1 BR English Basement Apt. in SE Cap Hill near Potomac Ave. Metro (blue and orange lines), Harris Teeter, Highways 295 and 395. Christian homeowner looking for a single or couple with a desire to build Christian community. Hardwood floors, lots of light, fireplace, large BR with double closets, dining space, LR, and one BATH. New appliances including stove, fridge, W/D. \$1300/mo + util. One off-street parking space available. If interested, Contact emiliekao@yahoo.com.

ROOMMATE WANTED: Looking for CF to fill one available room by Sep 1 in our 4 BR home. The house has 2 BA, full K, LR, DR, basement (with W/D). Hardwood floors, working fireplace, backyard and front yard, but the best part is the community developed among the house-mates! Available BR is a spacious, upstairs room with windows and large closet. Driveway parking and easy access to major highways in and out of DC, 1-mile walk to Clarendon or a quick bus ride to Rosslyn. \$640/mo + utilities (usually run \$80-100/mo depending on the season). E-mail TheParsonageLadies@gmail.com.

HOUSING AVAILABLE: I recently renovated the basement of my home in SE DC. My house is located on a quiet street, less than 15 minutes from Capital Hill. It's a great renovation with a full bath and complete kitchen. Over 600 sq. ft. with a private entrance, shared laundry room, street parking. \$750 + split utilities. Contact me, Cynthia at cryabbafather@yahoo.com or 703-371-3392.

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Two rooms for CF's coming open in a Christian community in SE DC: one late July, one late August. Looking for roommates with a heart for the neighborhood, openness to each other, and commitment to prayer. Expenses, including groceries and utilities, run no more than \$650/mo. Contact Stephanie Brown with questions, 202.290.6691 or sbrowndc@gmail.com.

HOUSE-SITTING OR SUBLET OFFER: After serving with World Vision for 6 years in Senegal and Kenya, the Simpson Family are in the process of purchasing a townhouse on 17th and C streets NE. While remodeling the townhouse over a 2 1/2 mo. period, they are looking to sub-let or house-sit for a family nearby in Capitol Hill. They are also available to house sit and take care of pets during this period. Contact Andrew/Sharon at 202-657-3866 (A), 202-657-7087 (S), senegalsimpsons@yahoo.com

DESK AVAILABLE: If you are interested in a free tall desk (with shelves above) and an accompanying tall bookshelf, contact Bill Shobe at 202-492-4204.

EVENING OF HEALING PRAYER

The Evening of Healing Prayer will be held on Tuesday, August 31 at 7:30 PM. This prayer service is open to all those currently attending a COSC homegroup. If you would like to schedule a 30 minute prayer appointment, or attend the service for a time of silent prayer, please e-mail or call Deborah at the church office by Friday, August 27th: deborah@christour shepherd.org / 202-544-9599.