

Religion in the First Amendment



Religion, as distinct from virtue, or morality, consists in the performance of the duties we owe directly to God, from a principle of obedience to His will. Hence we often speak of religion and virtue, as different branches of one system, or the duties of the first and second tables of the law.

“Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.” George Washington.

Taken from Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, #3 of 5 definitions given.



There is confusion as to what the first amendment means when it says: *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”* Unless we define the word ‘religion’ we won’t be able to correctly interpret or understand what the framers had in mind. Judges have said they can’t define the term ‘religion’, it is to ambiguous for them to explain.

That was not the case in the past. Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary gives an easy to understand explanation (quoted above). It was never the intent of the framers of our constitution to eliminate God from government, we were never to be an atheistic nation. In fact they pointed out our freedoms come from God: *“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights...”*. This comes from the Declaration of Independence, which is an organic law of the United States upon which this nation was founded. American people and leaders have always been free to acknowledge God.

Thus the correct understanding is: we don’t make any laws telling people how to worship; the first four of the Ten Commandments. The virtue of the society comes from obeying the last six of the Ten Commandments; the second table. With that understanding we can talk about God or we can ignore Him according to our beliefs, without the force of law to make people worship by keeping a certain day, making or not making images, or by what name we call God or if we have other gods than the one mentioned in the Bible and the first four Commandments.

George Washington’s comment, included at the end of the dictionary definition, should be noted here. Please reread it above. He is saying that if the people don’t have a personal relationship with the God of the first four of the Ten Commandments then they will not long maintain the morality outlined in the last six of the Ten Commandments. Congress cannot pass a law to make that happen, nor can it make a law preventing that from happening. A free people must make those choices, for or against God, on their own. The consequences of not making the decision to follow the moral laws given by God lead to a breakdown of order in the society. Once this breakdown becomes unbearable the people are willing to forgo freedom to gain back

order. With no foundational values to fall back on, strength of arms brings order: tyranny. With tyranny comes persecution of dissenters. The government then takes the place of God.

America, was never an atheist nation. The majority, including the founders, believed we are answerable to God. They, and we, have collectively over the years understood the Ten Commandments were a code to live by to maintain a blessed nation. The first amendment spelled out the correct concept for governing.

Man is spiritual, as well as physical and mental, and history tells us a tyrannical state cannot, even with the sword, eliminate the need for man to worship. The next step is for man (government) to replace God by making his own rules for worship (Pharaoh, Caesar, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Etc). Conformity becomes dominate over freedom. Incidentally, Mao's little Red book is the biggest seller of any book, outside the Bible, in the world. It's an example of man replacing God with another ideology and then passing laws to enforce obedience to man's laws contrary to God's law. Once this happens the state becomes god to the people and you have a system that will force all to 'conform' or they will be punished. We have seen this in history and some counties today. One of the current punishments now being used world-wide is sanctions, the forbidding to buy and sell.

The concept of blessings coming from freedom, as the society allows all to have and follow their faith, or no faith, as they are convicted, is giving way to the idea of letting a larger group impose what they see as truth on all with the force of law and arms. Having freedom to speak and acknowledge God is far different than forcing compliance with the consequence of punishment. Freedom works, and is best, when there is respect for all people to hold and be able to teach what they choose. An Atheist, Evolutionist, Christian, Muslim, Jew and all others are free to hold and teach in the free market place of idea's what they want. A healthy concept might be; since all are equally protected then among those groups there exists those teaching the closest to what is the Truth. By all protecting each other the whole group shares the blessing that exists for the people closest to the Truth. And God will honor that concept of freedom knowing that all honest at heart will one day come in contact with the full Truth and be able to make a decision. If the state forces, through laws and arms, one form of compliance, that act removes the blessings. Freedom dies.

When unwise leaders deceive enough people of the world, and take control using apparently good justification, these leaders combine a false religious system with the power of the state to justify taking freedom of worship from the individual and thus bring to pass the time described by John in Revelation *. The honest in heart must choose between the God of the Bible or the manmade god.

In understanding this issue we also have a better grasp of what Jesus was saying when He said to render to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God's. The first four, the first table of the Ten Commandments, tell us what we owe God. The last six, the second table, tells us what Caesar has jurisdiction over, our relationship to our fellow man, civil order.

Romans 13 describes maintaining order, the second table of the law, the last six of the Ten Commandments (quoted in verse 9). Even a good government will never force

worship, which only creates hypocrites, outward compliance to avoid conflict, with no heart to continue once the threat of punishment is removed. Acts 5:29 describes the duty of a person who believes in God to follow the first table of the Ten Commandments, the first four. God expects us to follow all ten, but the state enforces only the last six. The states responsibility concerning the first four is to make sure all are free to either keep them or not according to their own conscience. Thus the first Amendment: *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”* Religion being the first four. The dictionary defined the two thus: **“...Hence we often speak of religion and virtue, as different branches of one system, or the duties of the first and second tables of the law.”**

When we say the word ‘religion’ means any mention of God we are stretching beyond what the writers of the first amendment had in mind. If we take any mention of God out of our discourse in government then we take away the freedom of the people to speak as they wish. We remove freedom of speech, also we are *“...prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”* of ‘religion’. If an atheist chooses to never offer a prayer in public that is his right. If a religious person chooses to offer a prayer that is their right. Our responsibility is to have mutual respect for one another’s freedom of speech: the greater principle.

We must never pass laws requiring how people worship. A law that infringes on, or effects, any of the first four of the Ten Commandments would be against the United States Constitution.

The freedoms and blessings enjoyed by the United States are a result of our heritage of using the Bible as an inspiration in forming our government. The concept of freedom is derived from the Bible. The freedom of the house of worship, separate from the state, is a Biblical concept. Read 2 Chronicles 26:18 for a small picture of this issue. The priest is to be a priest and the king is to be the king. They influence each other but each has a certain role to fill. The Priests were not to do the work of the king and the king was not to do the work of the priest. The undeniable fact is the United States was founded upon Biblical principles by those who believed the Bible to be a sure foundation for a sound nation. The Ten Commandments are the definition of right and wrong. This was the understanding of the people who lived in earlier times during, and for years, after the acceptance of the Constitution. Over a period of time we have forgotten what made us a great and blessed people, now we are questioning everything and rebelling against the God of the Bible. It is the principles of the Bible that gave us our freedom. By rebelling against that understanding we will lose both freedom and blessings. Once laws are passed that don’t allow all to have freedom to keep or not keep the first four of the Ten Commandments as they choose, we will be stepping back in history to a time of intolerance. A time our forbearers fled from to establish a land of freedom. The pendulum of life is constantly swinging back and forth. We started with the understanding of the Ten Commandments being the guide to defining morality and virtue, but with no force as to how to arrive at that conclusion. Let the churches and houses of worship teach in a climate of freedom. This understanding was commonly accepted at the time of the drafting of the first amendment. In order for the nation to survive it must, by free choice and education, accept the morality as defined by the last six of the Ten Commandments, accomplished not by force, but through education.

Many adopt these principles by what is called nature's laws and nature's God. Many who don't attend a house of worship recognize these principles and advocate them. That is why our founders worded the first amendment the way it is. Religion (the first four of the Ten Commandments) cannot be forced or forbidden.

The church is to be the conscience of the nation without the state's interference. Just like our personal conscience, if we silence it we have trouble. If the state can silence the church then it can do what it wants with little fear of exposure. All that is from a Biblical perspective. We see how it has played out in history over and over. A strong church, free to teach what is right and wrong, is the surest protection of falling away from morality. The people's protection, from religious persecution, comes from the fact that the church has no weapons to use in the enforcement of its teaching (the first four, religion). Thus the state is made up of people of all persuasions and will never take the freedom of religion from the people. The church has nothing to fear from the state since the state protects everyone's right to teach in the free market place of ideas. The problem comes when the state legislates actions that interfere with any of the first table of the Ten Commandments, the first four. A group gains the ear of the state to use the state's power to impose its teaching (regarding the first four) on the people, with the threat of punishment. A moral blessed state will ultimately find itself in harmony with the last six, regardless of what drove them to that conclusion. By protecting the provision of the first amendment, freedom of religion, the goal is accomplished. The breakdown would only come if the teachers fail to teach Truth. Each must find their definition of that term and teach in the open market place with the state's protection. Thus with this freedom it's hoped the majority would willingly adopt the principles of the last six of the Ten Commandments.

Here we are, back to where we started: *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."* The authors of our Constitution were very wise indeed.

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* *"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world..."* Re 12:9

"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Re 13:15-17

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." Ho 4:6