

“Our country is obsessed with ideas like rights, tolerance, freedom, Christian nationalism, separation of church and state, and all the various phobias and “isms” one could imagine. Yet very few in our culture understand these concepts or their histories. In *Meant To Be Free*, Jay Lucas, a long-time friend of mine, presents a clear, compelling, and insightful account of the importance and history of religious liberty. But make no mistake, this is no dry historical account! With a pastor’s heart, Jay’s writing is biblical, engaging, and very practical! For anyone who wishes to understand and defend religious liberty, this book is for you! It will inform, encourage, and equip you to defend the hope that is in you!”

Jeriah D. Shank, pastor, theologian, and apologist, Slater Baptist Church, Slater, Iowa.

“Readers of *Meant to be Free* will find out what my community and I have been blessed to know for years, Jay Lucas is a strong faith leader, historian, and research scholar who ties history and Biblical truths into lessons and solutions for modern day issues. I enjoyed the well-researched history of America’s founders, review of the church throughout the years, and explanation of the Bible as they each pertain to religious freedom. The concepts in this book are easily applied to many of today’s important discussions.”

Bob Peterson, district 91 representative, The Ohio House of Representatives.

“Once again, my friend and co-laborer, Jay Lucas, has produced an important work on a subject whose importance grows with each passing day: a biblical, theological, and historical basis for religious liberty. Jay writes as a pastor whose concern for God’s people rings through loud and clear, and who pulls his argument from Scripture, theology, church history, and apologetics. This book provides believers with a real tool equipping us with a biblical defense for the first amendment (inalienable) rights of all believers to freely exercise their faith without inter-

ference from the government, and corrects the aberrant, contemporary misapplication of “separation of church and state” today, re-positioning it in its original historical setting. A dialogue format between a believer and unbeliever over the matter of religious freedom not only contemporizes the issue, but also illustrates how an everyday believer can give an “answer” (apologia) to the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:15).” I highly commend this book to the Christian reading public.

Michael Canham, director, The Barnabas Initiative.

“Meant to be Free is a must read for every pastor and layman. This book will inspire you personally to have a closer walk with God and will educate you about where our society is heading. The Biblical basis of Christian liberty is vital for the church today!”

Tony Garren, pastor, Fayette Bible Church, Washington Court House, Ohio.

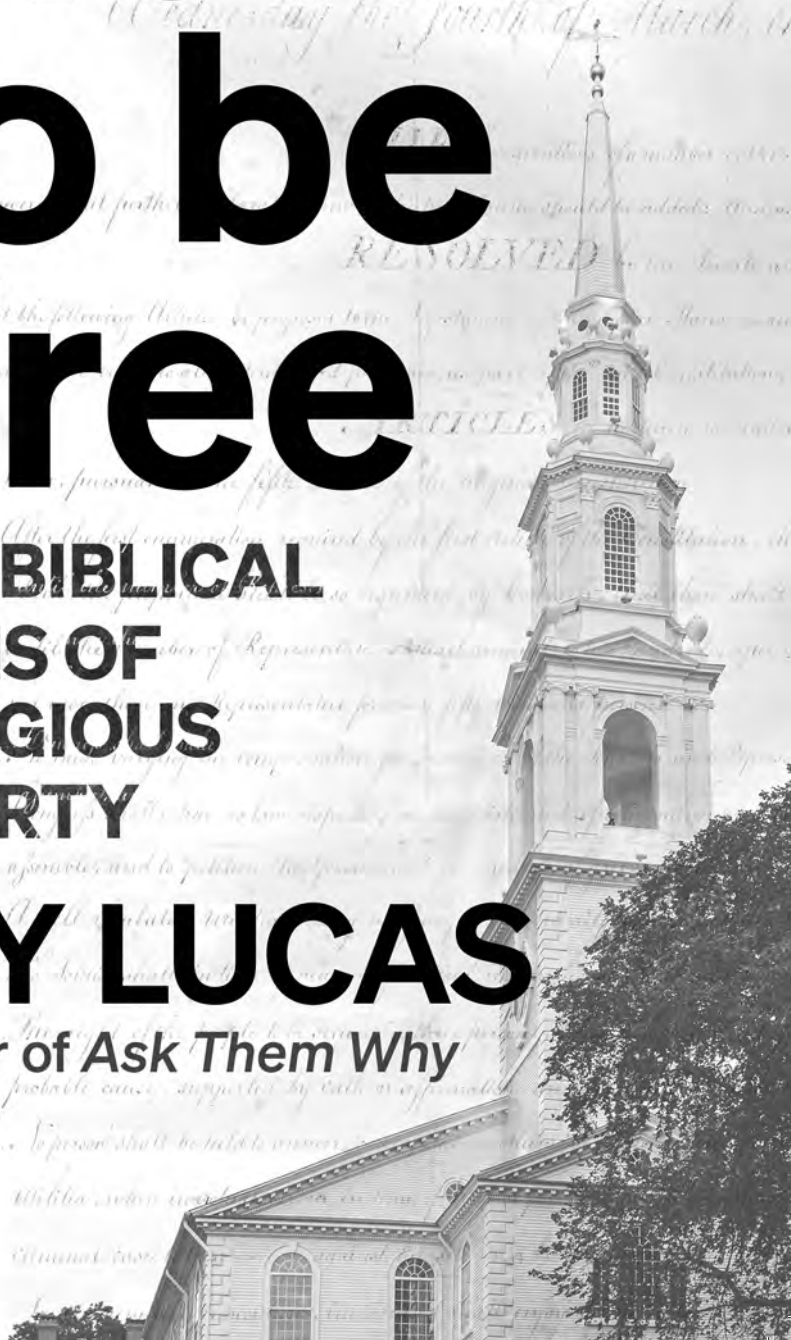
Meant to Be Free

Meant to be Free

**THE BIBLICAL
BASIS OF
RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY**

JAY LUCAS

Author of *Ask Them Why*



Meant to Be Free: The Biblical Basis of Religious Liberty

Copyright © 2025 by Regular Baptist Books

Published by Regular Baptist Books
 244 S Randall Rd #1188
 Elgin, Illinois 60123

Printed in the United States of America

First printing 2025

Cover design: Brannon McAllister

Interior design: Gabriel Leake

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Law, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Trade Paperback ISBN: 979-888973130-6

EPUB ISBN: 979-8-88973-132-0

PDF ISBN: 979-8-88973-133-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Name: Lucas, Jay, 1961–

Title: Meant to be free : the biblical basis of religious liberty

Identifiers: LCCN 2024936077 | ISBN 9798889731306 (paperback) | 9798889731320
 (ebook) | 979889731337 (PDF)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024936077>

Regular Baptist Books is an imprint of Regular Baptist Press.

24	25	26	27	28	29	30
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Contents

	Preface	ix
1	Meant to Be Free	1
2	Caesar Is Lord	19
3	Why the World Hates Christians	37
4	Is Religious Liberty Biblical?	55
5	Liberty Comes to America	73
6	The Greater Revolution	97
7	Christians in the Lions' Den	122
8	The Rights Fight	143
9	Ask Them Why	166
10	The Sons of Issachar	183
11	The Conversation	203
	Appendix A: A Public Debate	231
	Appendix B: The Stain of Slavery	243
	Notes	253
	Bibliography	285

Preface

“The best laid plans of mice and men” is a saying adapted from a Robert Burns poem published in 1786. It is a way of noting how easily our best made plans can quickly unravel. Such is the case with this book.

I began writing this book in June 2019, with the goal of submitting it to Regular Baptist Press by December 31, 2019. As that first deadline approached, I found that the manuscript was about 85 percent complete. Regular Baptist Press (RBP) graciously extended the deadline to February 2020. Something unexpected happened as I was about to put the finishing touches on this book about religious liberty. The COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and across the country churches were told by their state and local governments that their right to assemble for worship was being suspended. In some cities churchgoers were directly threatened with fines and even arrest if they chose to assemble.

Among the things I found disturbing was how few government officials and people in general seemed interested in asking questions about

the role of religious liberty in the policies being announced. It also occurred to me that I had almost submitted a manuscript about religious liberty in America mere weeks before the greatest challenge to religious liberty ever faced in America directly affected tens of thousands of local churches, Christian schools, and Christian ministries.

So what did I do? I stopped writing (by this time the manuscript was 95 percent complete) and simply observed what was happening. I did not even glance at the manuscript. I found myself wondering if America had changed so much in a matter of a few months that my manuscript had become obsolete even before I sent it to RBP.

Then in early June 2020, I reread my manuscript for the first time in many weeks. The necessity and urgency for immediately completing and submitting this book were reaffirmed. After all, the “best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men / Gang aft agley” (i.e., often go wrong). On June 15, 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States announced a landmark decision in the case *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which ruled that gender identity (i.e., transgenderism) is protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. What this might mean for Christian employers (churches, schools, businesses) remained to be seen, but there was a genuine concern that it would lead to the further eroding of religious liberty in America. The *Bostock* decision, and the arguments used to justify it, once again caused me to hesitate. Should I wait until legal analysts could weigh in with their expert opinions, or was it even more incumbent upon me to quickly finish?

As the months went by, even more momentous events took place that challenged the idea of religious liberty in America. In March 2021, the Speaker of the House of Representatives introduced a legislative proposal called the Equality Act. This bill would add sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes under federal civil rights law. Christians who hold to Biblical teachings about human sexuality and

gender could possibly find themselves being charged with violating federal civil rights protections. As 2021 continued to unfold, vaccine mandates began to be imposed upon government employees (including the military), private businesses, employees, and students across America. Applications for exemptions based upon religious conscience soon numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Many of those applications were quickly rejected, deepening the controversy over religious liberty.

Because of these developments and my desire to see how these issues would be resolved, *Meant to Be Free* was becoming a book I might never complete. This is the challenge that comes with writing a book that addresses current events. New history is being made every day. It would be like trying to write a book about World War II in December 1944. Although by then the war was already more than five years old, there were still new battles to be fought. (World War II officially ended with Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945.) As you read this book, you will be able to observe the limitations that come with addressing current events. However, what is of greater importance is the timeless nature of God's Word and its unchanging truths. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:7–8).

While it is important to study the historical development of religious liberty in early American history and to analyze current attacks against religious liberty, the real benefit comes from gaining understanding of God's Word and growing in one's devotion to the Supreme Judge of the universe.

Although it might seem a bit odd, I want to cite a statement from this book's first chapter (p. 2). I draw your attention to it now because it was one of the first things I wrote when I began this project in

2019. Back then I could not have imagined what would happen in the ensuing years.

We are so accustomed to religious liberty that we rarely stop to think about it. In that sense it is much like breathing. From the moment we are born until the moment we die, we are breathing. An average person who lives to be seventy-five will take over six hundred million breaths of air in his lifetime. Unless we are struggling with a respiratory condition, breathing is so natural that we do not spend much time thinking about it. Having said that, I invite you to hold your breath for two minutes, then near the end, tell me what you are thinking about (if you are still conscious). I can say with a fair degree of certainty that even before the two minutes are complete, you will be thinking about breathing almost to the exclusion of anything else. So it is with religious liberty. Until it is diminished or taken away, most people seldom think about it.

Since I first wrote those words back in 2019, they have been put to the test. It does seem as though religious liberty has been diminished right in front of our eyes. Perhaps you are reading this book in response to your own concerns about the future of religious liberty in a rapidly changing culture. Or maybe the subtitle, which claims there is a Biblical basis for religious liberty, has made you curious and you want to investigate to see if the claim can be established. I hope some readers who are opposed to the tenets of evangelical Christianity will read this book with a critical or skeptical eye. No matter what brings you to these pages, you are most welcome here!

Meant to Be Free is written to serve as an introduction to the topic of religious liberty. It would be a futile task to attempt to write a comprehensive study, for it would have to survey thousands of years of human history and incorporate the works of seemingly countless theologians,

political scientists, and philosophers. It is a sad reality that this important topic, which is such a significant part of the American experience, is seldom studied and is little understood by a great majority of Americans, even though it affects every one of us. It is far past the time for Americans in general to study and understand the topic of religious liberty and not leave it solely in the domain of specialists.

We cannot expect public schools or secular colleges and universities to effectively and accurately teach about religious liberty, because the topic is filled with Biblical and theological considerations. I am not saying that schools should ignore teaching about religious liberty, for an informed citizenry is essential. Still, without an understanding of the centrality of the Bible in the historical development of religious liberty, any teacher's or professor's knowledge of this subject will be partial at best and will be prone to distortion and misrepresentation. Since many academics hold the Bible in contempt, they will most likely ignore it, or even attack it, when human rights are being discussed.

This state of affairs should motivate the Christian community to develop teaching platforms where Christians can be taught this vitally important part of the Christian worldview. I address this need in chapter 10, "The Sons of Issachar." My prayer is that the day will soon come when the information in this book is so commonly known and understood that nearly every spiritually mature Christian will be able to explain and defend religious liberty to his neighbors.

Speaking of neighbors, I believe a good reason for reading this book is so we believers can love our neighbors in keeping with the parable Jesus taught about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. A culture that embraces true religious liberty will reap many benefits that cultures without religious liberty will not have. If I love my unsaved neighbor the way I should, I will genuinely want him to experience the good benefits of religious liberty. When this "first freedom" (religious freedom is

the first freedom mentioned in the Bill of Rights) is cherished, all other God-given rights are protected and enjoyed as well.

One other objective needs to be made clear at the outset: I did not write this book as a means of clamoring for or demanding our rights. The Christian's ultimate duty is not to himself but to the Lord. If the case for religious liberty is Biblically sound, then that is the fundamental and ultimate reason for proclaiming it. Not every proponent of religious liberty during America's founding had those noble motives; but many did, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

American Christian, those who came before you sacrificed much to secure the religious liberty you have experienced throughout your lifetime. If the Lord's return for His church is still some years away, will those who come after you have reason to be thankful for what you did to understand and promote the Biblical basis for religious liberty?

Meant to Be Free

You are about to read a dialogue between Kirsten and James, students at a state university. Kirsten is a Christian and James is not.¹ While this is a fictional account, the content of their discussion and the seriousness of its implications are anything but fictional. Their discussion is a realistic portrayal of a clash of ideas and beliefs which indicate that religious liberty as it has been experienced in America for over two centuries is under assault. Their conversation will touch on matters that directly affect your life and the lives of those whom you love. You definitely ought to eavesdrop on Kirsten and James's conversation. Under normal circumstances I would never encourage you to eavesdrop, but these days are not ordinary; they are revolutionary.

The Theme: Religious Liberty

The central theme of this book is religious liberty and the reasons it matters so much. *Meant to Be Free* is written primarily to Christian be-

lievers but with the hope that non-Christians/unbelievers will read it too. Since the ratification of the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments of the Constitution of the United States) in December 1791, Americans have enjoyed something largely unknown by the majority of people who have ever lived. However, we are so accustomed to religious liberty that we rarely stop to think about it. In that sense it is much like breathing. From the moment we are born until the moment we die, we are breathing. An average person who lives to be seventy-five will take over six hundred million breaths of air in his² lifetime. Unless we are struggling with a respiratory condition, breathing is so natural that we do not spend much time thinking about it. Having said that, I invite you to hold your breath for two minutes, then near the end, tell me what you are thinking about (if you are still conscious). I can say with a fair degree of certainty that even before the two minutes are complete, you will be thinking about breathing almost to the exclusion of anything else. So it is with religious liberty. Until it is diminished or taken away, most people seldom think about it. When it is taken away, it will have our undivided attention.

❓ How would you define religious liberty? What has it meant in your life?

The Danger: Losing Religious Liberty

Meant to Be Free has been written to teach Christians what religious liberty is, why it matters, and how to explain and defend it as we engage the surrounding culture. This teaching will begin as we listen to what Kirsten and James say. In one sense, their discussion is typical in that it reflects things about which many Americans are growing increasingly

concerned. But in a different sense, this conversation is atypical; for it seems that today the important and needed exchanges of ideas often get shut down before they get started. There is a spirit of anger in the land similar to what the apostle Paul encountered when he attempted to explain his Christian beliefs and ministry after his arrest in Jerusalem. Surrounded by an angry crowd, Paul simply asked for an opportunity to speak in his own defense. At first the crowd allowed him to speak, but that did not last long: “And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’” (Acts 22:22).

If you pay attention to current events, you can probably think of examples of people being shouted down and not given an opportunity to speak. Alarming, religious liberty is under some of the most intense assault on typical college or university campuses.³ One of the primary duties of Christians is to evangelize by telling others about the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone. Two major aspects of that statement will cause outrage on a campus:

1. The word *salvation* means that people need to be saved from sin. Is homosexuality a sin? Is abortion a sin? Is transgenderism a sin? If a Christian answers yes to any of these (and is willing to say so openly), he will receive extreme scorn and anger, no matter how filled with compassion he is for people ensnared by those particular sins.⁴
2. The phrase “Jesus Christ alone” marks a Christian as an intolerant religious bigot who should be censored. It might be okay to mention Jesus, but if a believer dares to claim that Jesus is the only way to Heaven and that non-Christian religions are in error, that Christian had better be prepared to pay a price.

Although the dialogue between Kirsten and James is between two college students, the issues matter for the whole church. *Meant to Be Free* is

written for homeschool moms and public school teachers, for pastors and deacons, for grandparents and young adults, for business owners and construction workers and mechanics, for lawyers and doctors and assembly line workers, for farmers and computer engineers and political leaders. On a personal note, I have written it with my children and grandchildren in mind, because I recognize they do not have the same degree of freedom I had at their age and will have even less when they get to be my present age. Whether we recognize it or not, we all are affected by religious liberty. While it affects our churches, religious liberty (or the lack thereof) also has an impact on our communities, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, families, and friends. Whatever Kirsten and James are about to say, we need to listen attentively.

The University Students: Kirsten and James

Please allow me to introduce Kirsten and James and explain the circumstances that created their conversation. Kirsten is in the second semester of her junior year. She is working toward a bachelor of science degree in nursing and hopes to eventually work as a nurse practitioner. Kirsten comes from a Christian home, and she made a profession of faith at summer camp when she was eleven years old. She enjoyed being part of her church's youth group. She went through public high school with a few good Christian friends who encouraged her.

James is also in his junior year and is majoring in health care administration. He chose this major because he wants to combine his interest in business administration with his fascination with the inner workings of major hospitals. James has almost no religious background. While he was growing up, his parents took him to church a few times, usually in conjunction with Christmas or Easter. He found it boring, and his parents did not seem any more interested than he was. They divorced

during his first year of high school, which completely ended anyone in the family attending church, and none of them missed it.

Kirsten and James have some mutual friends and took the same course in statistical analysis the previous semester. While they aren't close friends, they are on friendly terms. James knows that Kirsten participates in a Christian fellowship group on campus, and she knows from comments he made in class that he is strongly pro-choice on the issue of abortion. They have never had a serious conversation about anything significant, but that is about to change. James is sitting alone at a table in a coffee shop on campus. He is studying for an exam but is not overly concerned about it. Kirsten has just walked in and ordered a caramel latte. She was going to order it to go; but she and James spotted each other almost simultaneously, and he waved for her to join him. As soon as she paid for her drink, she went over and sat down at James's table.⁵

JAMES: Hey, Kirsten, what's up?

KIRSTEN: Hi, James. I just finished my chemistry lab. It feels great to have a few hours with nothing to do. But don't let me bother you.

JAMES: No. I'm ready to take a break. I have an exam in my labor law class, but I think I'm ready. It's mostly review of stuff I've already learned.

KIRSTEN: Labor law? That's a part of the medical field that's unavoidable, but I prefer the hands-on part of patient care.

JAMES: Well, that's something I've wondered about you.

KIRSTEN: What do you mean?

JAMES: You're anti-choice, aren't you?

KIRSTEN: I think it is more accurate to say I am pro-life.

JAMES: You can call it that, but it still ends up denying women their health-care rights. If you worked in my hospital, I wouldn't let you bring your religion into your job.

KIRSTEN: Actually, James, a big reason I want to be a nurse is because of my faith.

JAMES: Don't you see what a major problem that is?

KIRSTEN: Why is that a problem? Many excellent nurses are Christians.

JAMES: The problem isn't that they are Christians. I have no problem with what they believe if they keep it to themselves. But that's what's wrong with a lot of Christians. They try to impose their beliefs on others. They think they can tell a woman what she can do with her body. If you're not willing to provide a woman what she is legally entitled to, I wouldn't hire you to begin with.

KIRSTEN: I love the thought of being a nurse and serving patients, but I also have to be true to my conscience.

JAMES: I think you're a nice person, Kirsten, but you are listening to the wrong people.

KIRSTEN: What do you mean?

JAMES: I'm talking about what happened on campus last week. Those two guys who are always handing out Bibles at the quad and trying to convert people. You heard about the riot they started.

KIRSTEN: I don't think they started it, and as nasty as things got, it hardly qualified as a riot.

JAMES: It was bad enough that the campus police had to intervene. They shouldn't be allowed here in the first place. They are haters and bigots.

KIRSTEN: James, I've heard those guys plenty of times. They are polite and are simply trying to share their faith with students.

JAMES: How? By being intolerant against gays?

KIRSTEN: They were responding to a question. Someone asked them if homosexuality is a sin, and they gave an honest answer about what they believe. They don't want to offend anyone, but they are honest about what the Bible teaches.

JAMES: That's hate speech! They come from that church in town that is filled with Bible-thumpers. They think anyone who doesn't believe what they do is going to Hell. There are many different religions represented on this campus. How narrow-minded do you have to be to tell people the only way to Heaven is Jesus? They have no right to come here

and put other religions down. It's about time they got what they deserve.

KIRSTEN: Got what they deserve? Thirty people surrounded them and began screaming obscenities at them and tore their pamphlets up. These two guys were just trying to talk to people about their faith.

JAMES: They're bigots and homophobes. I know this: if they ever set foot on campus again, there won't be thirty people to stop them; there will be three hundred. I've heard a lot of people say that. And if that happens, they'd better not expect campus police to protect them.

KIRSTEN: Aren't you concerned about free speech and religious liberty, especially on a university campus? Isn't this the best place to exchange and debate differing ideas, including ideas about God?

JAMES: Hate speech is not free speech. We can't stop them from preaching their garbage inside their church, but it needs to stay there. And I think the government needs to start taking away tax exemptions from churches that preach hate and intolerance. There are limits on free speech. You can't shout "fire!" in a crowded theater if there is no fire.

KIRSTEN: The church I grew up in back home is filled with some of the nicest people you could ever hope to meet. But they believe what the Bible says is true and that God's standards don't change

just to accommodate changing cultures or to be popular. Yes, they preach against sin, but it is for the purpose of helping people discover hope and forgiveness.

JAMES: Kirsten, do yourself a favor and don't tell people where you go to church. Next year you will be looking for a job, and I can tell you that human resources people always look at an applicant's social media footprint. And I can also tell you that most hospital administrators resent it when people in the health-care field want special treatment because their precious consciences get in the way. I say that if people have those beliefs, then they shouldn't become doctors or nurses. Find something else to do. Nothing personal, Kirsten. I know you are very religious, but things have to change in this country. We can't keep tolerating bigotry.

KIRSTEN: James, may I ask you a big favor? Can we meet here at the exact same time next week and talk some more? I know you are passionate about the things you are saying, and I want to put some thought into how I would respond to your concerns. . . . I'll buy.

JAMES: Yeah, we can do that, but don't expect me to change my mind. I'm trying to change your mind.

KIRSTEN: Sounds good, James, and best wishes on your exam.

The Challenge: Defending Religious Liberty

We will leave Kirsten and James at this point and rejoin them in chapter 11, “The Conversation.” If you had been in Kirsten’s place in that setting, would you have been ready to give solid answers to James’s accusations in a way that honors Christ and critiques the issues at hand? As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15–16, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and *always be ready* to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed” (italics added).

Peter did not write his epistle just to pastors, but to all believers. First Peter 5:1–4 does speak specifically to pastors, or elders, but that fact actually reinforces that the rest of Peter’s letter, including 3:15–16, is for all believers. The primary concern in 1 Peter 3:15 is the defense of the gospel, but Christians also need to be ready to defend other components of the Christian faith.



How well Kirsten does in her meeting with James next week will depend in part on how well her local church has disciplined and equipped her. Do you think you have been equipped to engage someone who thinks like James?

Kirsten hopes to share the gospel with James one day. But in their first conversation, James raised an issue that for almost two centuries Christians in America rarely had to address or be ready to defend from a Biblical perspective: religious liberty. From 1791 until the middle of the twentieth century, it was hardly a blip on most people’s radar.⁶ That

“

Religious liberty is the principle wherein every individual should be free to think and to live according to his conscience and to fulfill the duties he has to God in all areas of life, free from government sanction or coercion, and to believe and to act in community with like-minded people. In short, religious liberty is the freedom to do what I ought.

has dramatically changed, and the meaning of religious liberty will become even more controversial in the years to come.

The Meaning: *Religious Liberty* Defined

Before going any further, let's establish the definition of religious liberty that will guide our study throughout this book. Religious liberty is the principle wherein every individual should be free to think and to live according to his conscience and to fulfill the duties he has to God in all areas of life, free from government sanction or coercion, and to believe and to act in community with like-minded people.⁷ In America today the word liberty is often understood as meaning "the freedom to do whatever I want." But historically liberty meant something more profound: "The freedom to do what I ought." The definition of liberty as "the freedom to do what I ought" puts God at the center, not man. People are important, and their religious liberty is sacred; but liberty is primarily about God and only secondarily about mankind. The word ought, as used here, is a recognition that we have a duty to God; and we ought to honor that duty. For this reason, religious liberty is seldom valued or protected in secular settings.

The Biblical basis of religious liberty and its place in the Christian worldview are rarely taught in the church today; therefore, many Christians know almost nothing about it. In many cases this is probably due first to the perception that it is a political issue and, second, to the popular sentiment that politics needs to be kept out of the church's teaching ministry. I believe religious liberty is a Biblical and theological issue and that the church has a duty to teach it along with the rest of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

As rare as it is for the doctrine of religious liberty to be taught in local churches today, the exact opposite was true in Colonial America. Be-

ginning with the arrival of Roger Williams in Boston in 1631, Christians wrestled with the issue (and with each other!) for 160 years in order to come to the view of religious liberty that has become known as “the First Freedom” in the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment begins with these words: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

At one time it would have been difficult to find a church that did not address the issue of religious liberty from the pulpit, especially in the aftermath of the powerful spiritual revival known as the Great Awakening that swept through the colonies beginning in the 1730s. Whether Americans today know it or not, or appreciate it or not, they all owe a debt of gratitude to the Christians of that era who worked through the implications of the gospel and the relationship of each person’s conscience to God. Sadly, and alarmingly, only a small percentage of the present American population, Christians included, genuinely understand the history of religious liberty and its Biblical underpinnings.



The comments James made to Kirsten exhibited practically no knowledge of religious liberty and its place in American culture.

This Book: Why and How to Read It

Why Read this Book

I believe that as part of its education program, the church in America needs to include teaching on the theology of religious liberty, its development in history, and its defense in a contemporary culture that

is more opposed to it than we recognize.⁸ Chapter 10, “The Sons of Issachar,” explores this need in greater detail. The title of that chapter is drawn from 1 Chronicles 12:32, “Of the sons of Issachar, who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do. . . .”

Meant to Be Free is written to provide Christians with at least some of the information they will need if they are ever in Kirsten’s shoes. As a pastor, I say “Thank You, Lord, for all the Kirstens out there, and please help us do our part to equip them to share the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with all the Jameses that are everywhere around us!”

Perhaps some readers will wonder about the special attention *Meant to Be Free* pays to the American church. Aren’t we spoiled and too comfort oriented? Shouldn’t we focus more on the sufferings being endured by our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who can hardly imagine how easy it is in America, blessed as we are with religious liberty? I have long had a burden for the persecuted church and the underground church. I have friends who live and serve in countries where religious liberty is unknown. I wonder if one of the reasons American Christians don’t do more to assist Christians around the world specifically pertaining to religious liberty is because for over two centuries it has been too easy to take our own liberty for granted. If so, it is possible God will permit us to lose more of our liberty as a means of giving us greater compassion for those who have never known religious liberty.⁹

I believe our goal should be to preserve religious liberty not just for the sake of Christians, but because it is also a blessing for our non-Christian neighbors. And while it might sound like an outdated mode of thinking, I think that a healthy model of religious liberty in America provides the rest of the world with an example worth imitating.

Having said this, I recognized that the gospel often thrives where persecution is most intense. We should not be surprised by this, because

“

I wonder if one of the reasons American Christians don't do more to assist Christians around the world specifically pertaining to religious liberty is because for over two centuries it has been too easy to take our own liberty for granted. If so, it is possible God will permit us to lose more of our liberty as a means of giving us greater compassion for those who have never known religious liberty.

God's power prevails over all: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

How to Read this Book

Here are a couple of suggestions I hope you will consider as you read *Meant to Be Free*. First, I invite you to have your Bible open as you read. Although you will read several Bible texts in the body of this book, I have included additional Scripture references that I encourage you to look up. Second, you will notice footnotes. Many of them contain additional information to supplement the main text, but they ended up as footnotes so as not to create too many side trails. But they are important.

In *Meant to Be Free* I have presupposed ("assumed from the outset") that God exists and the Bible is His Word. I have written from that perspective. I believe these two presuppositions are absolutely true and can be defended, but that is not the purpose of this book. In Kirsten's conversation with James next week, she will also presuppose the existence of God and the authority of the Bible. If James wants to ask her about it, she will happily schedule a follow-up meeting, but telling that part of her story would require a different book.

Kirsten: What You Can Learn

Kirsten is going to spend the next week praying about her scheduled meeting with James, for she understands that there is a spiritual component to this that only God can meet: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:18–20).

Kirsten is also going to read something about the history of religious liberty, and she is about to make a startling discovery: contemporary American culture is moving rapidly in the direction of the ancient Roman Empire.