

Thank you for the opportunity of addressing you this evening. It is both an honor and a privilege; one I do not take lightly.

We are meeting here to discuss the merits of House Bill 36.

I was ordained a minister of the Gospel in 2011. At the time, I pledged myself to protecting the sanctity of the Scriptures with my every word and deed. As I read Scripture, I am convinced of the pattern God set for marriage. We find absolute truth in the Bible. The first institution God ordained on earth, before government or religion, was the home. This template was created when God joined Adam and Eve in holy matrimony. Any arrangement beside this is a skewed picture of what God intends.

Just as I believe God created marriage, I believe He instituted government. The Bible says, in Romans chapter thirteen, that "the powers that be are ordained of God." I respect our laws and the officials that create them. Yet, like our fourth president, and father of our Constitution, James Madison wrote, I believed that "there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermingle with religion. It's least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation."

Finally I believe God instituted worship. God created all people with a conscience. We are given the freedom to worship Him as our conscience dictates. It is wrong for an individual to use force to compel another to worship God in any way that conflicts with his God-given conscience. If it be wrong for a man to so treat his neighbor, why is it that government can force one, who is ordained, to violate his conscience.

While thinking on these things, I reviewed one of our nation's founding documents, The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1786. Jefferson wished to be remembered for three things, and they are carved on his headstone: that he is the author of both The Declaration of Independence and of The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and that he is the father of the University of Virginia. So many timeless truths are outlined in the Statute for Religious Freedom. One of the most powerful thoughts is toward the end of the document when the future president wrote, "No man shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his

religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion." He concluded by declaring these rights "are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any such act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such an act will be an infringement of natural right."

You see, God has given all men certain inalienable rights; rights that were bestowed by Him to all people for all times. Anything less is an infringement upon those liberties. They violate our rights of conscience.

Roger Williams, an early arriver to the New World and founder of present day Rhode Island said that "government must remove itself from anything that touches upon human being's relationship with God." His purpose in founding Rhode Island was that he was "distressed by conscience." As a minister the state placed certain burdens upon him that are not found in the Bible. It was wrong, a sin, for him to violate his conscience. In conclusion, I refuse to perform a ceremony or preside over an occasion that violates my conscience and my rights as a citizen of the United States of America. I respect my neighbors' right of conscience. I pray that the state will respect mine.

Sincerely,
Brian Jay VanAman
Pastor
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