

Ben Carson Has Big Ideas About How Trump Could Unlock the Church's Prophetic Voice

Though once rivals on the Republican circuit, Dr. Ben Carson now serves President-elect Donald Trump as a godly counselor in an unofficial capacity.

As Trump describes removing the Johnson amendment, Carson told a select group of evangelicals exactly how the move would free pastors to help return America to Judeo-Christian values.

"If we get the Johnson Amendment rescinded, pastors can have fiery sermons and talk about what's right and what's wrong (again)," Carson said as part of the Salt and Light Lecture conference call.

Officially, the Johnson Amendment prohibits those with 501(c)(3) tax distinctions like churches and ministries from engaging in political commentary. The amendment is often cited as to why pastors refrain from discussing controversial sins, such as homosexuality, in their pulpits.

"Now we hear pleasant things and everybody sings 'Kumbaya,'" and it's not an accurate representation of the world we live in," Carson says of today's churches. "If we rescind the Johnson Amendment and people are not afraid of losing their tax (status), then we will see Donald Trump be vigorous," and Judeo-Christian values return to the American forefront.

Trump isn't the only advocate to rescind the amendment.

Erik Stanley, senior legal counsel and head of the Pulpit Initiative for the Alliance Defense Fund, writes for the *Los Angeles Times*:

The Johnson Amendment allows the government to determine when

a pastor's speech becomes too "political." That is an absurdly ridiculous standard. A pastor's speech from the pulpit that talks about candidates from a scriptural point of view is religious speech. That speech doesn't become political any more than a pastor's speech becomes commercial when he gives a Scripture-based assessment of the current financial debacle on Wall Street. Allowing government agents to make that determination is as absurd as asking a first-grader to design and build NASA's next space shuttle. The Johnson Amendment also allows the government to parse the content of a pastor's sermon to determine whether it violates the law. That is called a content-based restriction on speech, which the (First) Amendment's free-speech clause prohibits unless the government has a compelling reason for censorship.

Without the amendment, Carson says, America can once again receive conviction from its pastors and become a godly nation once more.

But churches are, perhaps, not in as much danger as they might expect.

"The truth is, no church has never lost its tax-exempt status for either endorsing or opposing any political candidate or endorsing or opposing a local, state or federal law," said Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel. "Voting is both a privilege and a duty. The future of America is at stake every time we face a national election, and this upcoming election is one of the most important elections in recent history. To not vote is to vote. Silence is not an option. I encourage pastors to remove the muzzle that secularists want to put on them and exchange it for a megaphone to speak biblical truths regarding social and moral issues."

In 2008, a host of pastors made plans to give politically charged sermons to protest the law.

According to a new Pew Research study, 64 percent of regular churchgoers said they heard sermons on religious freedom, abortion, homosexuality, immigration, environmental issues and more during the election season.