

Fireman's Reputation Torched After Stand for Biblical Morality

Atlanta's Kelvin Cochran may be a firefighter, but he's not fireproof, as the latest controversy shows. Despite a long and distinguished career (including a stint as the U.S. Fire Administrator), Chief Cochran is at the center of an explosive debate over free speech on the job after the city suspended him for allegedly handing out copies of a book he wrote and self-published on biblical morality.

Atlanta officials claim Cochran somehow violated workplace policy by openly discussing his Christian views on sexuality. In the book, *Who Told You That You Are Naked?*, Cochran explains the nature of sin, which affects us all. Included in the book is an unapologetic description of homosexuality as "perversion"—a reference to which Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed took offense. "I profoundly disagree with and am deeply disturbed by the sentiments expressed in the paperback regarding the LGBT community. I will not tolerate discrimination of any kind within my administration."

In addition to being suspended, Cochran has to forfeit a month's worth of pay *and* undergo "sensitivity training." Although the section of the book dealing with homosexuality was only one part of the discussion, it was the sole focus of the city's inquiry. While a number of public interest law firms are reviewing Cochran's legal options, the immediate effect is clear: a further stripping of Christian faith from the public square.

Obviously, Mayor Reed's message is that city employees have to check their beliefs—and specifically, their *religious* beliefs—at the door of public service. And it

doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where this persecution will lead: to a country where no evidence of biblical morality will be tolerated. Christians who want to serve in a public capacity will have to go underground spiritually—or steer clear of those careers altogether. The fallout would be disastrous.

With the government assuming more and more power, do we really want police officers, prosecutors and even firemen who have no moral foundation to be the guardians of justice? Trust me. We haven't seen the level of scandal, corruption and political abuse that would follow such a purge.

And how is Mayor Reed building his case? On the city's special rights ordinance—the same type of measure that led to the subpoena of Houston pastors, the prosecution of Colorado bakers, and the joblessness of California photographers. If the people don't stand up and demand their First Amendment rights, this fire chief won't be the only one having his career extinguished because he believes in biblical morality.

Tony Perkins *is president of Family Research Council.*