

Mayor Parker, City Attorney Feldman: You Will Not Put Us in the Closet

Houston Mayor Annise Parker and City Attorney David Feldman, you have gone too far, and your bullying will backfire. The pastors of Houston, joined by Christian leaders across the country, will not be intimidated and they will not back down.

Earlier this week, Americans were outraged and shocked to learn that the city of Houston issued subpoenas to several local pastors, demanding to inspect their sermons, speeches, presentations and communications to their congregations having anything to do with homosexuality or gender identity.

Immediately, the Alliance Defending Freedom called this a “witch hunt” and “inquisition,” and then Sen. Ted Cruz branded your actions “both shocking and shameful.”

Your state’s attorney general, Greg Abbott, also weighed in, demanding that you “withdraw the subpoenas without further delay.”

Abbott stated clearly that, “Religious institutions and their congregants should never have to worry that a government they disagree with will attempt to interfere in their religious affairs. Instead of safeguarding that trust, you appear to have given some of the most powerful law [legal] firms in Houston free rein to harass and intimidate pastors who oppose city policy.”

But you have not backed down from your position in the name of religious freedom or even simple moral sanity. To the contrary, you have entrenched yourselves further, refusing to comply today with a legal request to drop the subpoenas.

Instead, you have simply removed the word “sermons,” which, as you’re fully aware, changes nothing, since the demand for these pastors’ “speeches” and other forms of communications (including “presentations”) remains intact.

Ms. Parker and Mr. Feldman, your actions will live on in infamy, and I have even read comments from self-identified gays and lesbians who are mortified by what you have done.

When my producer contacted your office, Mayor Parker, asking someone from your staff to join me on my national radio broadcast on Wednesday, we received an email from Janice Evans, chief policy officer and director of Communications, Office of Mayor Annise Parker.

Ms. Evans politely declined our invitation, stating that, “Mayor Parker agrees with those who are concerned about the city legal department’s subpoenas for pastors’ sermons. ... Neither the mayor nor City Attorney David Feldman were aware the subpoenas had been issued until yesterday. Both agree the original documents were overly broad. The city will move to narrow the scope during an upcoming court hearing.” (This is the same statement released by Darian Ward, the mayor’s press secretary.)

How is it then, that on Tuesday, you (Mayor Parker) tweeted out, “If the 5 pastors used pulpits for politics, their sermons are fair game.”

This is absolutely hypocritical, if not downright deceptive.

Now, however, the rubber has met the road with your refusal to rescind these outrageous subpoenas, as announced on my radio broadcast today by Pastor Steve Riggle, senior pastor of Grace Community Church, and one of the pastors that your office targeted.

You can no longer deny complicity in this egregious and abusive act of government overreach. In reality, you are

leading the charge.

We can also see that your initial press release, quoted above, along with the media conference you both gave on Wednesday, was an absolute sham.

In light of this, I am joining together with Pastor Riggle and Christian leaders throughout the nation to take this Sunday to address this issue (even in brief), to renounce the actions of Mayor Parker and City Attorney Feldman (who has also been accused of illegally dismissing a petition that Houston pastors helped circulate), and more importantly, to say to the nation: When you mess with the pulpits of Texas, you mess with all of us.

For the last decade, I have been stating that gay activists who came out of the closet one generation ago now want to put us in the closet, and I have often been mocked and vilified for this statement (which is not an indictment on all those who identify as LGBT but rather focuses on the actions of the activists).

Today, those words can no longer be mocked or rejected, and we, as followers of Jesus and leaders in the body, need to shout out to Houston and to the nation: You will not put us in the closet!

Pastors and leaders, for more background, go [here](#).

Michael Brown *is the author of Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding With Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show The Line of Fire on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or at @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.*