

Hopeful Veteran: Memorial Day Reminds Us the Fight for Religious Freedom Rages On

On Memorial Day, people across the U.S. will honor our military heroes, those who made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives to fight for America's freedom, including freedom of religion.

But one military veteran-turned-freedom fighter in the battleground of the legal system says the fight for religious freedom continues today at full blaze—and most Christians are not even fully aware that our culture has reached the danger zone.

Michael Berry is a veteran who served in Afghanistan in 2008 to help preserve America's freedoms. When he left the U.S. Marine Corps after eight years of active duty as an attorney, he took up the mantle of religious liberty litigator at First Liberty Institute, the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious liberty for all Americans. Berry, who is the Vice President of External Affairs, Director of Military Affairs and Senior Counsel for First Liberty, is a man on a mission that is bigger than himself.

For Berry, this Memorial Day is a solemn reminder of the words of former President Ronald Reagan: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for."

With a chilling message for Christians, Berry says, "The fastest way to lose religious liberty is to fail to stand up for our rights. It's thinking that the religious liberty fight is someone else's fight. If you don't stand up as a person of faith, who will? If you do nothing, then you will quickly lose

your freedom in the shadows of so-called 'tolerance, diversity and inclusivity.' We all have to have the proper framework for what it means to fight for religious freedom. If you visit a totalitarian country, what religious freedom means comes into focus."

But are Christians ready for the continuing fight amid the Biden administration's blatant efforts to move our country toward a totalitarian state of censorship, religious discrimination, globalist agenda-led open borders, communist-style lockdowns, identity politics and anti-Christian, Marxist-friendly promotion of "equity" instead of the distinctly American value of equality?

New battle lines have been drawn in recent years. Berry explains that many people of faith feel intimidated now more than ever. While it affects all religions, it is especially true when leftist people with biases against Christianity try to unfairly and single-mindedly twist and redefine Christian tenets as "intolerance." Ironically, these leftists of the woke progressive variety claim to be "tolerant."

The age of the fearful Christians who lack spiritual vitality and courageous faith continues. The majority of Americans claim to be "Christian" and support freedom for everyone, but they live in fear—including fear of government tyranny—and have seemingly lost sight of the meaning of freedom, making them ineffective.

This is partially self-inflicted because the church has backed down from the fight. Around the turn of the 21st century, the church in America as a whole abandoned the fight for culture, allowing the woke culture to dominate and eventually redefine "freedom."

"People of faith are hearing from others, 'I refuse to tolerate your intolerance.' That's where the threat to religious freedom is today," says Berry. "There is hostility

toward Christians about being open about their faith in the workplace. It becomes safer for people of faith to hide it or compartmentalize it.”

As fighting can take different forms, Berry fights on the legal front lines, but he says he can only do his job as a lawyer when a Christian chooses to demonstrate courageous faith. He cited the Coach Kennedy case.

Coach Joe Kennedy is a former Washington state high school football coach who lost his job after he took a stand by refusing to stop praying on the field immediately after games. He made a public statement asserting that the school district violated his religious freedom by trying to force him to cease praying so publicly after games.

“I was just doing the free exercise of my religion and wasn’t going to go hide it because I work for the government,” Coach Kennedy said in an NBC News interview. “No one in America should have to hide who they are or that they have faith.”

Berry adds that for Coach Kennedy, an 18-year Marine veteran, “The freedom he sacrificed for was taken away by his employer. He was told that his faith has no place in the public sphere. But Coach Kennedy showed courage and integrity. When more people of faith stand up for their religious freedom like Coach Kennedy, then you will see real change in America. As a nation, we can recover what has been lost. There is hope.”

One of the ways that Berry believes America can have a renewal in standing for religious freedom is by understanding the principles on which America was founded.

“From the beginning in 1776, our nation has fought wars over freedom,” says Berry. “Religious freedom was one of the main ideals and principles for the founding of our country. What has made America so great for centuries was to have all these faith traditions all coexist.”

But he notes that there have been sinister efforts to “promote revisionist history,” threatening to undermine present-day America with its roots as a nation founded on religious freedom, which is part of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Propaganda, such as the 1619 Project, which is full of factual errors and misrepresentation of primary source material taken out of context, has been elevated so that young people will be indoctrinated rather than celebrate the truth that America was founded in 1776 for the purpose of religious freedom and other freedoms bestowed by God, not any government.

When freedom is protected and enhanced in America, the American way of life opens up new possibilities for everyone and changes the atmosphere of the country. Nonetheless, American exceptionalism, according to Berry, doesn’t mean “perfect.” It requires vigilance, accountability, admission of mistakes, and ongoing efforts to restore what has been taken away.

“It’s important to pause on Memorial Day and reflect on how brave people in the U.S. military for centuries have fought for religious freedom, and we need to do our part today to continue to fight for religious freedom in the court system, in the workplace, on social media and elsewhere, as if we are on a mission field in our own country. Even if you don’t have the opportunity to make a public stance like Coach Kennedy did, you likely know someone who could use your support to protect their freedom.”

First Liberty, a nonprofit organization, advocates for people of faith, inevitably invoking the spiritual warfare that Spirit-sensitive Christians are typically familiar with. Prayer intercession is part of the strategy to take back America for freedom.

When asked what Christians can do to help support First

Liberty's mission the way they support missionaries who go to other countries to spread the gospel, Berry replies, "There are many ways to support First Liberty, but one of the most important ways is to support us through prayer." {eo2}

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