

Atheist Group Files Complaint Over Judge Tammy Kemp Giving Bible, Hug to Convicted Murderer

An atheist group filed a complaint over Judge Tammy Kemp giving her personal Bible and a hug to convicted murderer Amber Guyger after her trial Oct. 2.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) filed the complaint Thursday, Oct. 3, with a Texas government agency that investigates claims of judicial misconduct, according to *The New York Times*.

After the judge pronounced Guyger guilty of murdering Botham Jean in his own home, she left the courtroom and came back holding a Bible. She then placed it in front of Guyger, telling her, "You can have mine. I have three or four at home. This is the one I use every day before I go to bed."

Kemp then flipped open the Bible and directed Guyger to John 3:16.

"This is your job for the next month. Look right here, John 3:16. And this is where you start: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so whosoever believes'—stop right there and use your name: 'Amber believes.' Start with the Gospels. You read this whole book of John. This whole book."

After this, Kemp hugged Guyger and said, "You haven't done so much that you can't be forgiven. You did something bad in one moment in time. What you do now matters."

The judge's grace-filled response came after Botham's brother,

Brandt, publicly forgave Guyger and told her he wanted the best for her. The best, he told her, would be that she give her life to Jesus Christ.

But while Brandt's response to Guyger is his choice, the FFRF argues that Kemp's actions were inappropriate at best and unconstitutional at worst.

The FFRF says Kemp "handled a difficult trial with grace" but that she also "signaled to everyone watching ... that she is partial to Christian reform and Christian notions of forgiveness."

The atheist organization calls Kemp's four-minute conversation with Guyger "an ethics violation" and "an egregious abuse of power."

In her private life, the FFRF says, Kemp can practice her Christian faith, attend church, read her Bible and even evangelize.

"However, it violates a vital constitutional principle for a sitting judge to promote personal religious beliefs while acting in her official capacity," the group says in its statement. "She was in a government courtroom, dressed in a judicial robe, with all of the imprimatur of the state, including armed law enforcement officers, preaching to someone who was quite literally a captive audience, and even instructing her on which Bible verses to read!"

But some are coming to the judge's defense. First Liberty Institute, a U.S. legal organization that defends religious freedom, says the FFRF is off-base in its assessment of Kemp's actions.

"FFRF is protesting Judge Kemp rather than joining the rest of the nation celebrating the compassion and mercy Judge Kemp demonstrated," First Liberty responded in a statement. "We should all be thankful the law allows Judge Kemp's actions and

we stand with her and will gladly lead the charge in defending her noble and legal actions.”