

Judge Threatens Preacher with Arrest for Using Bible Verses Online

An online Christian preacher has been ordered by a Washington County judge in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to stay silent on social media for five years after he expressed his moral and religious concerns in posts about a church that endorses same-sex marriage and a public drag queen performance in front of children.

A team of attorneys with The Rutherford Institute, a nonprofit civil liberties organization, has stepped in to help Rich Penkoski. They're asking the Oklahoma Supreme Court to overturn the five-year restraining order against him, denouncing it as excessive and a clear violation of the pastor's First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion.

Penkoski leads the Tennessee-based online ministry Warriors for Christ.

Rutherford Institute attorneys also point out that in the absence of any actual threats by Penkoski or proof that he sought to incite violence through the use of Bible verses, the court's rationale appears to be based solely on claims that LGBTQ leaders felt harassed and fearful about how others might react to the Bible verses cited in the preacher's social media posts.

"Religious individuals have a clear First Amendment right to publicly cite Bible verses that reflect their concerns about moral issues of the day without being accused of stalking, harassing, or terrorizing those who are offended by the sentiments," said constitutional attorney John W. Whitehead, president of The Rutherford Institute.

He warned, “This case is a foreshadowing of the government’s efforts to insulate the populace from all things that might cause offense by criminalizing nonviolent First Amendment activities (speech, thought, and actions) perceived as politically incorrect.”

✖ According to the institute, in one of Penkoski’s social media posts, he shared another church’s public photo of a same-sex wedding involving leaders of an LGBTQ organization and quoted Bible verses describing God’s judgment of sin.

In a second post, Penkoski criticized the church’s publicly shared photos of children celebrating Pride Month.

In a third post, Penkoski weighed in on a regional effort to ban adult-oriented entertainment in public spaces.

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