

The Tragic Inaction of the Church

The author of several books, Eric Metaxas is perhaps best known for *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* and *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. He often provides commentary on the subject of **religious freedom**.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Christian who resisted the Nazis and chose to suffer—and eventually die—for the sake of the oppressed Jews. William Wilberforce led the campaign to end the British slave trade. Both of these men did what they did because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

But Metaxas does more than write and speak on the feats of these great heroes of the faith. He urges the church of today to take the same kind of actions.

Before we can take on our role as the church in areas like social justice activism and preserving society, we must be aware of our current freedoms and our position in regard to the state.

“There is a fundamental misunderstanding of the separation of church and state. The church is to be protected *from* the state. Not the reverse,” explains Metaxas. “People have divorced faith from public life, mostly because of this misunderstanding.”

We have also confused the terms *freedom of worship* with *freedom of religion*. So, what is the difference?

Freedom of religion allows us to take our faith into the public square as we leave our corporate worship settings. “The founders have said that we can and should do that,” adds Metaxas. “That means we can exercise our faith freely in the

workplace, or wherever we are.”

Freedom of worship allows us to worship within the confines of the church building. However, that freedom is not valid outside of that church building. Furthermore, that means that whatever views you have on the hot-button social issues, such as **abortion** or **same-sex marriage** must be kept within the walls your home or your church building.

“They have freedom of worship in China, and they had it in Germany in the 1930s. Today, that is we have—freedom of worship. So today, we are slowly privatizing our faith because of this great misunderstanding,” says Metaxas. “Once we leave our homes or our churches, we are expected to accept the secular humanist view of everything.”

This privatization of our faith is believed to be an outward sign of a loss of religious freedom. The publicity of faith is what Metaxas and countless others believe to have made our country great.

For example, today, because of the faith of our Founding Fathers, we do not argue about *whether* to help the needy. We argue about *how* to do it. Helping the needy is a biblical principle, and we still do so today because of the values instilled by our godly Founding Fathers.

In his latest book, *Seven Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*, Metaxas gives examples of people—more specifically, seven men—who changed their culture because they exercised **freedom of religion**.

“When Christian voices are stifled, salt and light are removed from the culture. We see Jackie Robinson exercise his faith on the baseball field and was instrumental in the civil rights movement. And, of course, Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer did what they did because they publicly exercised their faith,” Metaxas points out.

In all of these cases and countless others, faith played a role in expanding freedom, blessing the nation, and ministering to the outcast.

Metaxas continues, “When you stifle voices of faith, you destroy all of those opportunities to live out faith by doing good things. So, when we as believers lose religious freedom, everyone loses.”

The Gospel: The Ultimate Catalyst for Action

Wilberforce, Bonhoeffer and Robinson all made a profound impact on their societies, but the common thread between these men runs deeper than external results. They were motivated by more than justice; they were motivated by the gospel. They were not merely social or cultural Christians. They took Scripture very seriously, and then they took action.

Metaxas urges today’s church to do the same—to be involved in everything from culture to politics, willing to speak the truth humbly and boldly in love.

“If the church had been the church in Germany, had stood up and spoken loudly, as one, they could have won. But they were timid, just as Christians are timid now on so many issues. The church has to be heroically, courageously vocal. People will suffer because the church has not stepped up and lived out the faith we claim to have.”

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