

Upper Room

Religious Freedom: The Value of the Journey

By: Erwin B.



In today's society, there are many confusing ideas about what defines "freedom of religious expression". The words of John Smyth, in 1612, shed light on this issue when he said, "...the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgression (Rom. xii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the King, and lawgiver of the church and conscience." Dr. Leon McBeth, a seminary professor offers insight regarding Smyth's words, saying, "This brief statement covers all the basic points of later, more extensive treatises."

John Smyth's words mark the beginning of our journey in religious freedom. Some may inquire, "That is well and good. But, how does that relate to us?" The people in early America staked everything they had on them. They left Europe and England for freedom to live their lives without fear of persecution. They stood up against the State choosing one form of religion and from rulers forcing them to follow it. The penalty was what the State deemed necessary for all who chose to disobey.

A leading figure in New England church history, Isaac Backus summarized how the State treated

those who disobeyed this law. He said, "They stripped the shelves of pewter, of such as had it and of others that had not, they took away skillets, kettles, pots and warming-pans. Others they deprived of the means they got their bread with, viz., workmen's tools, and spinning-wheels. They drove away geese and swine from the doors of some others; from some that had cows; from

**"...Though it cost you
all you have, get
understanding."**

Proverbs 4:7b (NIV)

some that had but one they took that away. They took a yoke of oxen from one. Some they thrust into prison, where they had a long and tedious imprisonment. One brother was called from us and ordained a pastor of a Baptist church, and came for his family; at which time they seized him and drew him away, and thrust him into prison, where he was kept in the cold winter until somebody paid the money and let him out."

Each of us needs the same sense of conviction about religious freedom today. All attempts to destroy Sarah Palin are basically attacks against her faith in God. Those who belittle her cannot tolerate her values. Her faith dictates that she value the life she carried rather than abort her son.

Sarah Palin's stand, regarding how she lives her life, is based on her Christian beliefs. She firmly believes in religious freedom for everyone. By supporting her, we choose to make all political warfare for her worth it. Let's remain steadfast. Our religious freedom is worth it. 🦌