

Christ in Prophecy

Conference 57: Kelly Shackelford on Defense of Religious Freedom, Part 1

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: Did you know that the persecution of Christians in our nation is increasing exponentially in the military, in the classroom, in the workplace, and in the public arena? For a powerful and sobering presentation about this crisis, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. The theme of our 2019 annual Bible conference was Contending for the Faith. The keynote speaker was Kelly Shackelford, who is the founder and president of the largest law firm in America that is devoted entirely to the defense of religious liberty. The firm is located in Plano, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, and it is named First Liberty Institute because it is devoted to protecting the religious liberty that is promised to Americans in the First Amendment to our Constitution.

Our audience at the conference was aghast as Kelly presented a sweeping overview of the rapidly increasing persecution of Christians in the military, the classroom, the workplace and the public arena.

Kelly made it very clear that we are in the midst of a cultural war in which the opponents of Christianity are determined to eradicate as many Christian liberties as possible.

Here now, speaking in behalf of our religious liberties, is Kelly Shackelford.

Portion of Kelly Shackelford's Keynote Presentation:

Kelly Shackelford: I'm going to talk about something that might surprise a lot of you, which is what I am going to talk about tonight, it is the most exciting time in everybody in here's entire life when you understand what is happening in this country with religious freedom. So, you hear a lot of bad news, get ready for some good news because God is at work.

Let me start with the basics. The basics what is First Liberty? First Liberty is the largest legal organization in the country that all we do is religious freedom. So, if you are a fifth-grade boy by the name of Giovanni Rubio and you're told you can bring any book you want to free reading time at school. And then you bring your favorite book, your Bible, and you're told you can't have religious books at school. And you are a poor family, and you live outside of Miami Dade what do you do? I mean do you get \$100,000 out of the bank and go hire a team of attorneys? That's why we exist. We came in so that we could represent Giovanni and his family, so that when we won the case, which we did, we don't just win for Giovanni and his family, but we set a precedent that protects all of our children and our grandchildren. And that is the best quick summary I can give you for what First Liberty does.

How did I get involved in this? Back when I was in high school, I knew my gifts were in analytical thinking and speaking. And I felt we'll I either need to be a pastor or a lawyer. And people said that's like a God or Satan choose isn't it between a pastor and a lawyer? And I analyzed my DNA and I looked, and I thought, you know I'd probably do better at dispensing justice, rather than mercy, so I would probably make a better lawyer than a pastor. And I went to law school and got out. Clerked for a federal judge. When you do that you sort of research, and write opinions, I did that for one year. And then you get, because you've had a unique perspective all the big law firms will give you really nice offers to come work for their law firm because you understand what it is like to be on the other side of the bench. You know what it is like to watch people that are arguing so strongly that they are losing their credibility. That are filing things they shouldn't file and all this. And so, I had all these nice offers. And I sat in my little clerk's office and I thought, "Lord, I just feel like I'd suffocate if I went and did a regular law job. And I remember thinking, well, what do you want to do?" And I thought, "Well, I want to use my legal skills because I feel like You have shown me, I should do that, but I want to help pastors and churches, and religious freedoms, and our founding principles. And I'd even like to go to seminary part-time if I could." And I laughed because there was no job, no paying job to do any such thing. And about two weeks later two lawyers from major law firms, I've never met these guys called me out of the blue, they said, "Will you go to lunch?" And I said, "Sure." And they said, "Look, we started donating our time for religious freedoms. We are getting so many calls now it is hurting our ability to make a living. But we heard about you and we were wondering. Would you be willing to come on, do legal cases, help pastors, churches, religious freedoms and our founding principles? And you can even go to seminary part-time if you want to."

Now, being in my mid-twenties, maybe a little immature in my faith, I said, "Let me pray about it." Like that wasn't an answer to prayer. And the next morning I said, "Yes." And they said, "How much do you need to live on?" And I was making \$28,000 as a clerk for a federal court, and these guys started pitching in out of their pocket. And that was 30, almost exactly 30 years ago. And 30 years later First Liberty is now the largest legal organization in the country that all we do is religious freedom.

So, I had no idea where this country was going, but God did. And a lot of times we encourage our kids don't go into that area, that is a dark area, that is a tough area. That is exactly where we need to take the light. And so, I guarantee you there are a lot of kids out there right now that are trying to figure out what they're supposed to do, and there is about to be a job created for them that doesn't even exist now because God has a mission for them in this country. And my example is one of millions of believers across our country. People who have given up on our country, they don't know God. There is no reason to give up because we have a lot of revivals in this country. And the truth is always more powerful than the darkness. So, I think great things are ahead.

But I want to start with some basics because everybody in here because of what Lamb & Lion Ministries is, you automatically know why religious freedoms, yes religious freedom is very important. It is something I really do care about because it is the only hope for people to hear the truth. But I want to go a little deeper about what if you are not even a person of faith, should you care about this? So, let's start with a video by a guy who doesn't even know the Lord.

Video by First Liberty

Peter Kalkus: If somebody told us that we were going to be crawling through barbed wired fences, and escaping, and moving across the ocean to America, everybody would have said, "That is absolutely silly. That will never happen."

If they'd called, let's say a politician who opposed them they'd put him on trial. But evidence might have been presented, but the outcome was a forgone conclusion. So, they had total control of you. That's how a dictatorship is run.

My father was first of all very patriotic, had strong beliefs in democracy. The people that he helped were if not friends, very good acquaintances. He knew they were going to get killed. So, when he got arrested, my mother got arrested, and my brother who was eight years older got arrested. So, my whole family except me were in jail. Then my father would have been executed but my mother managed to bribe the judge, he got sent to concentration camp in lieu of that, where he was beaten, and not fed, I mean basically tortured.

As soon as he escaped his name was on the radio all the time as one of the most wanted people. There was a secret service sitting in our front hallway all the time.

As you study history one needs to be vigilant all the time because you cannot take anything for granted. If you start losing freedoms, it is more than likely that it will keep on chipping away.

The opportunities we have. The ability to express yourself, and do whatever you want to do. And be able to achieve things without being blocked are unparalleled.

The political correctness is ridiculous. I mean it is going too far. Defending the ability to have crosses, or Christmas decorations is getting to the point of absurdity.

When I think about what was happening in Czechoslovakia at the time, there are parallels because I think anytime you start taking away people's freedom it just goes on. And you must take guard in the early stages, as opposed to waiting and let it all collapse when it is too late. Nobody expected Communism in Czechoslovakia, and when it happened, it happened.

Kelly Shackelford: This is I think a great reminder. A great picture of what happens when Christian aren't involved in their country. And so, this is one of the things that I love about Lamb & Lion, David Reagan, is that everybody isn't just talking about the Bible, they are actually talking about applying the Bible in our society, because if you don't incredible evil will occur. And our Founders called this our first freedom, because they understood if you lose religious freedom, you'll lose all your freedoms. Your political freedoms. This guy in this video came up to me after a talk and said, "Look, I'm not a person of faith like you are." He said, "But I think that what you guys are doing is the most important thing anybody is doing in this country, because I saw this happen in my country. They took down the religious symbols, and two months later we all lost our political freedoms." And he handed me check for \$5,000. And he said, "I am going to be supporting you for now on." And he doesn't even know Jesus. But he understands what happens to freedom when you lose religious freedom.

So, this being such a core, our Founders calling it our first freedom, how are we doing? Well, seven years ago we had 47 cases. Last year we had 447. I mean what is happening across the country, you see it, is more hostile than probably we've ever seen. I obviously can't go through all those cases. I thought I'd just give you a few examples of some of the areas that are troublesome to me, that need to be highlighted.

One would be the new set of cases we are having to do to protect people in senior living facilities. I mean this picture says it all. We've got a picture of Donna Dunbar, what they put in her senior center on the piano. I mean they refused to allow these seniors to have a Bible study. They've put an "All Christian Music" people think the attorneys did the sign right? Because it is such a great piece of evidence. No, this is what they did. You can't, religious discrimination in housing is against the law. But this is what they did to Donna.

Well, now you think, "Well, that is outrageous! I can't imagine anything more outrageous." Well, you haven't met Ken Hauge. Ken Hauge is a minister, 80 years old, and retired minister, and he is living in one of these facilities. And people in these facilities a lot of people can't leave, you know they are not in health, or other situations where they can go out to a church or whatever. So, a number of people came to Ken and they said, "Will you do a Bible study, maybe once a week?" And he said, "Sure, there is a common area room that any of us can use. I'm happy to put in to use that. And I'll be happy to do that." Well, they said, "No, you can use it, but not if you are going to do something religious like have a Bible study." And Ken was kind of shocked, but he said, "Okay. Well, I'll just hold it in my apartment." They have now sent him a letter telling him he will be evicted if he holds a Bible study in his apartment. And so, this is happening all across the country. And I think this is particularly grievous, it is just horrible because you're robbing people of the ability to ever have any sort of religious meeting, or service, or study the rest of their lives. Many of these people can't go. And this is something--I bet everybody in here knows somebody who is in one of these facilities right now. Whether your family member, your friend, we're all probably, most of us are going to be in one of these facilities someday. We've got to win this battle because this cannot be allowed to stand. We are in federal court on behalf of Ken Hauge, and we are hoping to set some precedent that will really affect the whole country. But that's just an example of the attacks.

The second thing I will tell you about is the attacks against Jewish synagogues. We have Jewish synagogues we are representing in Los Angeles, in Dallas, in New York, I mean all across the country. And you think in New York for instance they've told them that if you use a certain percentage, this is Airmont, New York, of your home for a religious meeting, then you violate the ordinance. Like 20%, and you have to count the common areas. They are literally measuring the bookcases that have religious books in their home, as a way to keep the Orthodox Jews in that community from having meetings.

Again, in Dallas we've got a Jewish synagogue. If you really hate Jews, and you want to get rid of Jews one of the things you can do with Orthodox Jews is close their synagogue because they have to walk to the synagogue. And so, if they can't have the synagogue they have to move. So, what they've done in this case, they, our clients met every health and safety code regulation, but the city still came after them. Why? Because they didn't have enough parking spaces. Okay, they are Orthodox Jews, they walk on the Sabbath, but this is why they are closing them down. And again, I want you to see the picture of what they did to the Rabbi's car. This is not in Germany or some other country, this is in the United States of America that we are having to defend these attacks. So, it is across the country, and its different things than what we used to think of.

We never used to have to think of attacks in your business because of your faith, right? Everybody has seen the crazy situation that we are fighting with the Chick-fila situation down in San Antonio. I think. I mean the idea that the government is coming after a business not because of anything the business has ever done, but because they found out that the Christian owners of the business have a private foundation that gave to a radical group like the Salvation Army, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I mean if the government can now destroy your business and not allow you to do business because they find the owners are Christians or giving to Christian causes, I mean we've lost religious freedom as a country.

And, so you've all heard about Aaron and Melissa Klein I think, two of our clients of Sweet Cakes. This is a family, a precious family, they started this business, they worked from nothing. They finally got a place. They have five beautiful children. And they had these two women come in, and they said we want to buy baked goods from you. And this is a gay couple. They served them. Loved them. Had no problem with that. Then they said, "We want you to do a custom

wedding cake." And they said, "Because of our biblical beliefs we can't celebrate things, we wouldn't do a divorce cake, we wouldn't do all kinds of things. But let us find you something where somebody will do a great job for you." And they did that. Aaron and Melissa have been through just an incredible five or six years. Death threats on their children. He's having to do side jobs, anything to keep bread on the table. And of course, it is not only a bad decision below but by the Oregon Court of Appeals, it's a very liberal state obviously. The good news is three weeks ago we got a victory at the United States Supreme Court, they reversed the decision from Oregon.

And sent it back down, and said, "You need to reevaluate your decision in light of the Masterpiece Decision which is about not being hostile to religion." And they said, "We are going to give you one more shot." I am pretty confident at this point that we are going to win this case. And that this issue is going to be won nationally because of who is on the court now, and how they see the Constitution and religious freedom. But the good news is we vacated this horrible decision. It is not bad news, but the truth is now we've got some work to do. It is going to take us a couple more years, but I am really confident that at the end we are going to have a victory. And it is not just going to be a victory for the Klein's, it is going to be a victory for every person of faith who is involved in business in this country.

The last, just quick clip area I'll give you is the military. You know six or so years ago I don't think we even had a military division. We didn't feel like there was this great need to defend religious freedom in the military. But, wow, did that change. We are having to defend chaplains, all kinds of attacks that we never imagined would be occurring within our military against those who are serving us. The idea that these people who are making these sacrifices would have their religious freedom stripped from them, when that is the very thing that they rely upon is outrageous. But we are having to. And many of you have probably heard about the Oscar Rodriguez case. Oscar is a 33-year veteran. And if you've seen the flag folding ceremonies that occur at a lot of places, private retirements, etcetera, it's where they slowly unfold the flag, and then they slowly fold it back. Oscar has a speech that goes with that, that is a very powerful speech. And it ends by saying, "God bless our flag. God bless our troops. God bless America." And a guy asked Oscar he said, "Oscar, would you be willing to do that at my retirement ceremony?" And he said, "I'd be honored to." And so, at this Chuck Roberson's retirement ceremony Oscar--unbeknown to Oscar the Colonel who leads that base decided he didn't want anybody mentioning God on his base, even in their own private retirement ceremony. So, as Oscar gets up. And you can look at this on-line sometime. Go to our website or whatever. There are video cameras going at somebody's retirement ceremony, so that is the good news for us. We captured all of this on video. As Oscar gets up, as the flag is being unfolded uniform military grab him and throw him out of the room because he's going to mention God. Something I never thought I would see in my life.

And now, the good news is policy has been changed now to where supposedly this won't happen again. And it's the written policy has been changed. But bad news is they are still in court arguing that you shouldn't be able to bring a lawsuit if they do this to somebody because there is nowhere for anybody to go court wise when they violate the First Amendment in our military. So, they're still defending what they did, although they are changing the policy realizing they are in big trouble because of what they did to Oscar.

The newest case we have in the military is a POW/MIA table. Many of you have probably seen one of these. I think we have a picture of the one in our case. It's a round table with a like a flower, and a place setting, and a Bible. It's to represent that we are waiting for them to come back. And this table was put up by a local POW/MIA group in the local VA building. And a lawsuit has been filed saying that they must remove the Bible from the table. Okay, that's not

just a Bible in that picture, that Bible was given to the VA group by a 95 year-old-veteran who is still alive today, who spent nine months in a German prisoner of war camp, and that's the Bible that got him through it. And the idea that we would have to ban Bibles from POW/MIA tables is just outrageous. But these are the kind of things that we are having to fight that we didn't used to. And I'll tell at first the VA told them to remove the Bible. But we spent some time with them, and this was before the lawsuit was filed. And they got up to speed on the law, they realized there is nothing wrong with a Bible on the table, and they stood their ground. And now a lawsuit has been filed, and we are defending the VA group who put the display up. And our VA the Federal Government is standing up against these guys as well. So, we are standing up together to fight against what they are trying to do.

Now, some of you are like, you know I came to a Lamb & Lion Conference and there's this depressing speaker on Friday night who was talking about all these bad things. So, let me tell you the good news. The good news is we have a method of dealing with these attacks, and it is not a theory we have been doing it for a long time and it is working. And really what it is it's the body of Christ. And that is if you were to look at legal groups that are out there, I don't care whether they are left-wing or right-wing or what their issue is, they have the same model: raise as much money as you can raise, use that money to hire as many attorneys as you can. Put those attorneys in an office in DC or New York, or LA and fly them around and cover as many of your cases as you can cover.

That's not our model. Our model is there are all these people of faith who went to law school because they wanted to make a difference. They wanted to stand for what was right. Thirty years later these are the best litigators at the best law firms in our country, and they've done honorable work for their clients. But they've never gotten to do a case for the Kingdom. And so, we go, and we sit down with them and we say, "Look, you are one of the best of the best. If we give you everything you need are you willing to give your time on one of these cases?" They're like sign me up, I've been waiting 35 years. We know what's going to happen when we give them that first case. For the first time in their life all their talent, all their gifts, all their training, everything they've learned their whole life is lined up with their faith. They've never felt that before.

It's kind of unfair but we now know we have them for the rest of their lives as one of network attorneys. And they're the big attorneys, they give cover to the younger attorneys. They get to taste what it's like. They get permission to work. So, if you were to go down the top 100 law firms in the United States, you'd find that the vast majority of those don't just donate their time, they are times they literally fight each other over who gets to donate their time on the case. The result of this is two-fold: number one, and this was my original plan, I thought, "You know we could get a lot more done if we had some of these people who are in the body giving of their time and their talents." And sure enough, average case we spend for every \$10,000 we spend we get \$60,000 donated. We're literally, it's like God is multiplying the fish and the loaves. It's a six to one multiplication of God's resources with God's people. So, it is incredible what we can accomplish through the body of Christ.

What I did not count on was the win/loss ratio. If you watch non-profit groups, they are fighting big monsters, the government, everything else. They maybe win 30% of their cases if they're good. Our win right now for 18 years in a row has been above 90% every year, every year.

And that's because of the body of Christ. I mean if we have a case in Montana, our attorney lives in Montana. He is from the biggest law firm in Montana. He's one of the best lawyers in Montana. And when he walks into court and looks at the judge, they grew up in elementary school together. They lost a tooth together in first grade. And then the ACLU guy flies in from

New York City or Los Angeles, well you know what he is playing an away game. He doesn't know the jury. He doesn't know the community.

So, if you look at how major corporations do their work, I mean it's exactly our model. I mean if you are Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan do you send your Detroit attorneys to Texas to defend you in a lawsuit? No, you do not. You get a Texas law firm to go in that court who knows the practice, who knows the jury, knows the community.

Closing

Dr. Reagan: Well, folks, that's all the time we have this week for Kelly's outstanding presentation. But, the Lord willing, we will continue with it next week because in the second half of it, Kelly shared some very positive and encouraging news about recent major court triumphs in behalf of religious liberty. And so, until next week, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our Redemption is drawing near."

End of Program