

GEORGIA BAPTIST CONVENTION RESOLUTION ON PROTECTING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

WHEREAS, God has made the human conscience inviolable (Romans 2:14–15; 1 Corinthians 4:3–5; 8:12; 10:29); and

WHEREAS, God has granted to all human beings the freedom to worship or not to worship according to the dictates of their consciences (Matthew 23:37; Revelation 3:20); and

WHEREAS, history is replete with examples of the disastrous results of governmental efforts to interfere with individual conscience and religious belief; and

WHEREAS, our Baptist forebears suffered great persecution from civil authorities, including beatings, imprisonment, and death because of their commitment to the inviolable nature of conscience and faith; and

WHEREAS, many of the first immigrants to the New World came to these shores motivated by their desire for religious liberty so that they could worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; and

WHEREAS, the Founders of this nation, recognizing this history and following in the great political tradition of John Locke, acknowledged that prior to the civil bonds of men in government, man's first bond and duty remained with his Creator, and man must be free to act upon his religious convictions without government coercion; and

WHEREAS, the Scriptures are clear that God gives each person his free choice to exercise his religious convictions as Joshua expressed when he said, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" and

WHEREAS, upon this great principle, the First Amendment of the United States Bill of Rights, recognizing that government should not interfere with the free choice of man to serve his Creator, states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free expression thereof;" and

WHEREAS, since Georgia's first Constitution in 1777 until today, freedom of religion has always been protected as a basic human right that government should not breach; and

WHEREAS, today's Georgia Constitution states, "Each person has the natural and inalienable right to worship God, each according to the dictates of that person's own conscience; and no human authority should, in any case, control or interfere with such right of conscience." It further states, "No inhabitant of this state shall be molested in person or property or be prohibited from holding any public office or trust on account of religious opinions; but the right of freedom of religion shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or justify practices inconsistent with the peace and safety of the state;" and

WHEREAS, it is the mandate of the Church, under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ, to shine the light of Scripture into the dark practices of a sinful culture, such as abortion, euthanasia, pornography, gambling, prostitution, religious persecution, and a host of other moral concerns which must be addressed in the political arena; and

WHEREAS, it is the mandate of the Church to be the salt of the earth to preserve the fabric of our culture from total immorality, chaos, lawlessness, and anarchy; and

WHEREAS, the Church will often be at odds with the culture and spirit of the age and its message rejected and scorned by the world, sometimes even by government coercion or violent means to silence the witness of the Church; and

WHEREAS, the God-given human right of religious liberty, which pre-existed before civil government itself, and which is a constitutional birthright of every American, should be personally cherished as a gift of God, strongly defended as a loving act toward our neighbors, and given every support to provide a bulwark against such coercion and persecution in this generation and the generations to come; and

WHEREAS, the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act (RFRA), which passed Congress in 1993, has proven to be an effective buttress for religious liberty, ensuring that federal laws and federal policies, even those that appear to be neutral toward religion on their face, cannot substantially burden religious liberty without a compelling state interest and with the least restrictive means; and

WHEREAS, RFRA was the leading reason why religious liberty claims were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Burnell v. Hobby Lobby*, ensuring that the Affordable Care Act could not coerce business owners, holding sincerely held religious beliefs, to violate their consciences and force them to include abortion-inducing drugs in their insurance coverage for employees; and

WHEREAS, RFRA only applies to federal laws and federal policies and cannot be applied in the States unless and until States pass their own RFRA's, as now 19 states have done, including all states that are contiguous to the State of Georgia; and

WHEREAS, recognizing that just as in the days when Daniel was thrown in the lion's den due to what appeared to be a neutral law cleverly crafted by those who hated his religion and his righteousness, we, too, live among those who love wickedness and will find ways to use the coercive power of government against God's people, and

WHEREAS, religious liberty has been increasingly under attack in the State of Georgia as is evidenced by restrictions on Christian clubs at several of the State's universities, denial of after-school Bible clubs in K-12 schools, restrictions against placing Bibles in public libraries, zoning restrictions that deny churches the use of their own property, a ban on the singing of religious Christmas songs at a school's Christmas program, opposition against prayer at football games, and even the dismissal of a university student from her course of study in counseling when she expressed disagreement with the same-sex lifestyle;

THEREFORE, we must defend religious liberty now for the sake of the next generation.

RESOLVED, that we pledge to defend the God-given and constitutionally guaranteed right of every American citizen to worship God freely in thought, word, and action, according to the dictates of his or her conscience, and to support the passage of legislation such as RFRA or other laws protecting religious liberty in our state and nation.

And be it further resolved that our Executive Director, Dr. J. Robert White, or our Public Affairs Representative, Pastor Mike Griffin, send a copy of this resolution to the Governor of the State of Georgia, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House and the sitting state senators and representatives who represent the people of Georgia.