

SAVING AMERICA

10 Reasons
Religious Freedom
is the Key to
Our Nation's Future



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Saving America: 10 Reasons Religious Freedom is the Key to Our Nation's Future

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Religious Freedom Benefits Us All

Without religious liberty, you don't have religious influence or the benefits that come with it.

Welcome to America, a land where religious freedom gives Americans of all religions—and even those who have no religion—the benefits of:

- A stronger economy
- Happier families
- Happier individuals
- Better education, achievement, and career satisfaction
- A safer society
- A more honest, ethical place to live
- Healthier Americans
- Generosity and charity
- Political freedom
- Individual rights

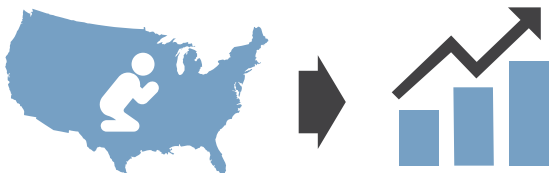
For the sake of simplicity, you could call this list our “Bill of Benefits,” bestowed on all Americans by the First Amendment in our Bill of Rights, which recognizes religious liberty as our *first liberty*.

Without religious liberty, you don't have religious *influence*, and without religious influence you don't get these benefits. This is the finding of modern economists, sociologists, psychologists, medical experts, and others. It was also the belief of the Founders of the country.

And if we lose religious liberty? Then we will almost certainly forfeit the advantages of religious influence and tear up our “Bill of Benefits.” That is why religious freedom is literally the key to America's future.

REASON 1: A Stronger Economy

Saving religious freedom is essential to the future of a thriving economy that benefits all Americans.



“[T]he total current savings to U.S. society from America’s religiousness is...\$2.67 trillion per year.”

This conclusion comes from Dr. Rodney Stark, one of the world’s foremost social scientists. He combed through his own extensive surveys and the scholarly work of other researchers, and tallied up the economic benefit of religious influence to America.¹ But Dr. Stark isn’t alone:

- After analyzing data from **59 nations over an 18-year period**, two leading Harvard economists found that “religion affects economic outcomes” positively.²
- They attributed this to “**religious beliefs that influence individual traits** such as honesty, work ethic, thrift and openness to strangers.” Most productive were Christian beliefs in God and an afterlife.³
- The conclusion of a massive study in the *Journal of Monetary Economics* was that, “On average, **religious beliefs are associated with 'good' economic attitudes**, where 'good' is defined as conducive to higher per capita income.”⁴

Why the connection? The great cultural anthropologist Max Weber, economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith, along with virtually all major American Founders, saw a **close link between religion, morality, and prosperity**. Religion, they found, supplies the inner motivations and external order necessary for a free economy to thrive.

But what if religious freedom is restricted? What if religion is limited, condemned, and stigmatized, and its “exercise” made less free? It follows that fewer citizens will *be* strongly religious. Religion’s guidance of Americans will weaken, and its benefits will drain out of our economy.

Wake-Up Call

Aaron and Melissa Klein were owners of a growing family business shut down after the government penalized them for politely standing for their religious beliefs—beliefs held by millions of other Americans.

Is punishing faith good for the economy?



REASON 2: Happier Families

*Religious freedom gives us
happier families and better marriages.*

Family is the foundation of society. Marriage is the cornerstone of that foundation. And religion is the cement holding it all together. Decades of research have shown that religion contributes to:

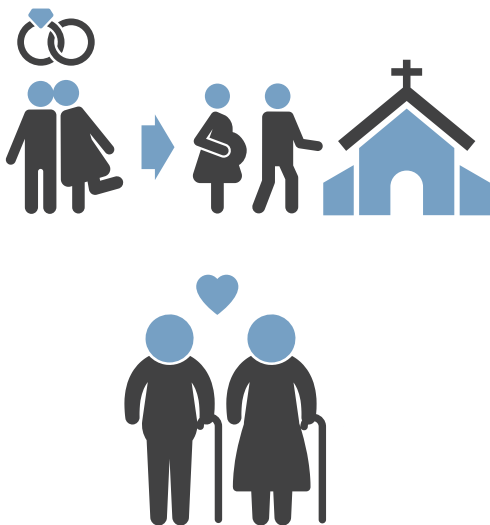
- **Less divorce:** Marriages where both spouses attend religious services are less than half as likely to divorce than non-religious neighbors.⁵
- **Less domestic violence and abuse:** Such marriages suffer from much less abuse.⁶
- **More emotional harmony:** The more religious the husbands, the happier the wives, and the more religious the wives, the happier the husbands.⁷
- **More sexual satisfaction:** This is not only true of religious couples today, but was even evidenced by the highly-religious Puritans, who documented the value of intimate husband-wife relations.⁸
- **Better father-child relations:** Multiple studies showed much better relationships in religious families—more hugs, more love, tighter bonds.⁹
- **Better mother-child relations:** Some research tracked relationships for years to strongly confirm this.¹⁰

■ **Fewer out-of-wedlock children.**¹¹

■ **Far less underage sexual activity.**¹²

But what if public schools and government edicts drive a wedge between children, on one hand, and their parents' faith on the other? What if schools—with the support of school boards and courts—restrict religious freedom, teach that students' religious beliefs are wrong, “discriminatory,” or otherwise dangerous, and stigmatize religious doctrines? What if secular skepticism is imposed by authority figures outside the family and enforced by law?

The data would warn that any such “liberation” of our children from religion risks cracking the very foundation of our nation: our families.



Marriages where both spouses attend religious services are less than half as likely to break up.

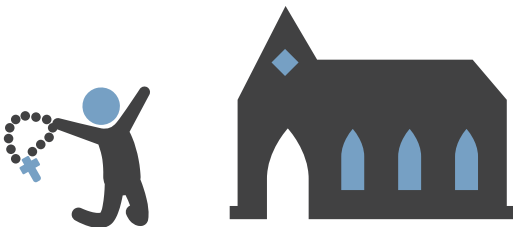
REASON 3:

Happier Individuals

Religious influence increases people's sense of meaningfulness, contentment, and purpose.

Content, happy individuals are like oil that makes the gears of society turn with minimal friction. And the facts show that religious activity produces such individuals.

In one review of numerous studies, **more religious practice was connected to greater hope and purpose.**¹³ Other research found that **a strong belief in eternal life decreased work-related stress and discontentment.**¹⁴



More than 6 in 10 studies showed that religious practice such as prayer strongly boosted **self-esteem**, and more than 8 in 10 showed religion leads to greater **social support**.¹⁵ Yet more studies showed that religion helped people with:

- Greater **coping skills** under stress.¹⁶
- A **positive view of circumstances**, seeing the spiritual significance.¹⁷
- Increased “**hope, will, purpose, fidelity, love, and care**” among high school students.¹⁸

Is it any wonder that as the freedom to openly practice faith has come under legal attack, levels of happiness have gone down and toxic emotions such as rage have risen strongly?

Wake-Up Call

Liz Loverde was a depressed high school student whose outlook was transformed by her faith. But until legal action prevailed, her school tried to stop her attempt to have a Christian club at her school to offer others the same hope.



REASON 4:

Education, Achievement, and Career Satisfaction

Religious freedom makes for a better educated, higher-achieving society.

In a review of multiple studies, a University of Texas researcher found that:

- **Math and reading scores** were better for those with more frequent religious practice.
- Children of religious families were more likely to pursue **advanced courses and complete degrees**.
- For disadvantaged youth in broken homes, religious practice was the top predictor of academic success and **escape from poverty**.¹⁹



Intellectually, regular church attenders spend more hours reading and are more likely to consume news, poetry, fiction, novels, and other “rounding” knowledge.²⁰

In other studies,²¹ regular church attenders, both white and African-American, are found to be *much* more likely than non-attenders to:

- Own homes
- Make investments
- Hold higher-level jobs
- Avoid unemployment
- Make payments

These are the traits of an educated, accomplished populous who find a satisfying role in the economy. The reason for such achievement is found in the personal habits infused by religious belief.

Wake-Up Call

Giovanni Rubeo had to fight to affirm his right to read his Bible during his school's free reading time—even though studies show religious practice is likely to help him succeed in school and life.



REASON 5: A Safer Society

Religious freedom is essential to give us safer communities and a more secure nation.

Domestic Safety: 247 research studies published between 1944 and 2010 reported that religion had a positive effect on **reducing crime and delinquency.**²²

Research also showed that the higher a city's rate of church membership, **the lower its rate of rape.**²³ In fact, crime statistics from America's major cities—even data as far back as the 1920s—showed that the higher a city's church membership rate, **the lower its rates for all of the following crimes:**

- Burglary
- Assault
- Larceny
- Homicide²⁴
- Robbery



Religious influence also has a **positive effect on reducing crime in inner cities.** One study of impoverished males in inner-city Philadelphia and Chicago showed that religious attendance at a high level was associated with the following:

- Reducing the likelihood of drug use by 46%
- Reducing the probability of dealing drugs by 57%

- Reducing the likelihood of committing a non-drug related crime by 39%²⁵

Government welfare programs could not compare to the positive effect of religious attendance on crime in this study.²⁶

National Security: Recent surveys reveal that a majority of service members claim that religion is "important" to them.²⁷

Gen. George Washington established the chaplain's corps in the Continental Army for that reason, stating the importance of religion to a strong fighting force.²⁸ **President Franklin Roosevelt** personally made sure WWII soldiers were provided with Bibles.²⁹ And **President Truman's** commission to study religion's effect on military performance found that "the idea of a moral law which is based on religious convictions and teachings" was "essential" for "strengthening [service members'] effectiveness as an instrument of our democratic form of government."³⁰

If America ceases to protect religious liberty, religious influence will decline, and America will become a more dangerous, less secure place to live.

Wake-Up Call

After decades of ministry that transformed a crime-ridden community, two churches in Houston's Fifth Ward took legal action when the city tried to seize their property and replace it with non-religious businesses.



REASON 6: A More Honest, Ethical Place to Live

Religion and religious freedom make Americans more honest and trustworthy.



Freedom for religion to flourish makes for a more honest, ethical population. Some effects of religion include:

- **Honesty:** In a study that tested the honesty of students who had been given an extra point on a test, a copy of the correct answers, and instructions to report whether their score was correct, **45% of those who attended church weekly were honest, compared with only 13% of students who either never or rarely attended church.**³¹ In another study, the most important factor in predicting student honesty was religiousness.³²

- **Niceness:** Research found that frequency of church attendance, frequency of prayer, and self-reported degree of religiousness were highly related to how nice a person was perceived to be.³³
- **Less Littering:** Americans who are religious are more likely to throw trash away in a bin than to litter.³⁴
- **Less Violence:** When combined with other freedoms, religious freedom improves the socio-economic progress of a society and reduces violent conflict.³⁵
- **Less Prejudice**³⁶
- **Better Assimilation of Immigrants**³⁷

A personal code of honor is the surest safeguard of a culture. And personal codes most often come from a view that life is oriented to a higher authority.

REASON 7:

Healthier Americans

Religious freedom is essential to enabling Americans to live longer, better quality lives.



Church attenders have an average life expectancy of 7.6 years longer than non-attenders.

Multiple studies have found that Americans who attend church weekly live much longer than those who never attend church.³⁸ One suggested that church attenders have an average life expectancy that is **7.6 years longer** than non-attenders.³⁹

In addition, a review of 250 studies found that people with higher religious commitment levels had a **reduced risk of colitis, various kinds of cancer, and untimely death.**⁴⁰

One researcher explained that religion may positively influence mental health, which, in turn, affects physical health.⁴¹

Other studies have shown that:

- People who frequently participate in religious activities and place a high importance on their faith experience a reduced risk for depression.⁴²

- People "being treated for mental health problems were less religious" than people in a matching group who were not being treated.⁴³
- The higher a metropolitan area's church membership rate, the lower its rate of suicide.⁴⁴

From these statistics we see that religious influence creates not just happier Americans, but also healthier Americans.

Wake-Up Call

Dr. Eric Walsh was a leading public health official. Inspired by his religious values, he combatted epidemics like AIDS. Yet he was fired by a government agency for sermons he gave at church meetings as a lay preacher. Can we afford to lose the work of such lifesaving public servants?



REASON 8: Generosity and Charity

Our freedom of religion is vital to a measurable outpouring of kindness that alleviates suffering.

Research conducted by Arthur Brooks of Syracuse University found that, compared with nonreligious individuals, religious individuals were:

- **40% more likely** to donate money to charity.
- Over two times as likely to volunteer.⁴⁵



Church attenders are more than twice as likely to volunteer for secular charities than non-attenders.

Religious Americans don't confine their generosity to religious charities. According to Dr. Rodney Stark, “Despite the substantial amounts they give to religious causes, the more religious Americans are the **major source of funding for the secular charities as well.**”⁴⁶

Research showed that people who attend religious services regularly are also **more likely than non-attenders to volunteer for secular causes.** Some 60% of regular attenders volunteered, compared to 29% of people who seldom or never attend church.⁴⁷

In addition to religious individuals, **religious congregations and faith-based ministries** also bless others with their generosity:

- Ram Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania found that **91% of surveyed congregations in Philadelphia had at least one program to provide those in need with goods and services.**

Replacing the services provided by the congregations of Philadelphia would cost **\$228 million per year.**⁴⁸

- When discussing **faith-based social service ministries**, Dr. Patrick F. Fagan noted, “By some estimates, these organizations provide **\$20 billion worth of privately funded social service delivery for more than 70 million Americans each year.**”⁴⁹

- A study that focused on churches with older properties found that **“For every congregation member served, more than four individuals from outside the congregation benefit from the community service programs supported by churches and synagogues.”**⁵⁰

REASON 9: Political Freedom

*Religious freedom is the foundation
of free government.*



*“No republic without liberty; no liberty without
virtue; no virtue without religion.”*

In his Farewell Address in 1796, President George Washington explained the relationship between religion, morality, and freedom:

*“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, **religion and morality are indispensable supports.** ...[R]eason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.*

*“It is substantially true that **virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.** The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government.”⁵¹*

This belief is not unique to Washington. Legal scholars Arlin Adams and Charles Emmerich noted that most of America’s Founders “believed that **religion was an essential cornerstone** for

morality, civic virtue, and democratic government.”⁵²

Scholar Michael Novak described the Founders’ logic this way: “*No republic without liberty; no liberty without virtue; no virtue without religion.*”⁵³

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political philosopher and the author of *Democracy in America*, believed a democracy needed a consensus of religious beliefs supporting the kind of common morality necessary for freedom.⁵⁴

This importance of religion for freedom doesn’t mean that everyone has to share identical religious beliefs⁵⁵ or that there should be an established national religion. After all, not all Founders had the same religious beliefs, and in the First Amendment they forbade Congress from establishing a national church. But it does mean that **religious influence is essential to maintaining a free society.**

Without religious freedom, religious influence will decline, and the foundation of America’s freedom will erode.

REASON 10: Individual Rights

Without religious liberty, all other liberties in the Bill of Rights are at risk.

There is a reason the first liberty recognized in the First Amendment to the Constitution regards religion. It bans “establishment” of a state religion and bars prohibition of “free exercise” of religion. It harkens back to the Declaration of Independence’s assertion that all rights are “unalienable” and given by a “Creator.”



Rights given by a Creator are transcendent and untouchable by government. And if freedom to acknowledge that Creator according to conscience is abolished, then every other right is likewise vulnerable, having no transcendent anchor.

As James Madison wrote, “Conscience is **the most sacred** of all property.”⁵⁶

In his “Memorial and Remonstrance” (1785), Madison argued against a certain bill allowing government involvement in religious institutions (in this case, supporting Christian ministers through a tax⁵⁷). Madison viewed this as a violation of religious liberty and believed that giving the legislature such authority would **endanger all other fundamental rights**. He argued that passing the bill would allow the legislature to:

- Control **freedom of the press**
- Abolish **trial by jury**
- Eliminate the **separation of powers**
- Establish a “**hereditary Assembly**”
- “[D]espoil us our very **right of suffrage**”⁵⁸

As Jennifer Marshall of The Heritage Foundation has observed, “[G]overnments that respect religious liberty tend to respect other freedoms as well.”⁵⁹

Further, as Madison pointed out, if the government violates religious freedom, **then there is no limit to what other fundamental rights the government can shrink or eliminate.**

“Conscience is the most sacred of all property.”

– James Madison

Conclusion: Faith Worth Saving

Religious influence—and therefore religious liberty—is good for America.

Religious liberty creates an environment where religious influence can flourish and all Americans can enjoy the greatest extent of religion's benefits.

As we have seen, religion positively affects the **economy, families, individuals, education, crime rates, honesty, health, generosity, political freedom, and individual rights**—and the benefits don't stop there. In fact, religion even helps those who are not personally religious.

Dr. Patrick Fagan noted, “No other dimension of life in America—with the exception of stable marriages and families, which in turn are strongly tied to religious practice—does more to promote the well-being and soundness of the nation's civil society than citizens' religious observance.”⁶⁰

Yet today, religious liberty in America is under legal attack.

This should be a cause for concern.

As Dr. Fagan pointed out, “To work to reduce the influence of religious belief or practice is to further the disintegration of society.”⁶¹

But in order to have the full extent of the benefits that come from religious influence, Americans must have the freedom to exercise faith in every area of life.

Open religious faith is good for America. In fact, it is essential to America's well-being and freedom, and it is key to America's future. **Religious influence, and therefore religious liberty, is worth saving.**

About First Liberty Institute

First Liberty Institute is the largest legal organization in the nation solely dedicated to defending and restoring religious liberty for all Americans. We defend Americans' religious freedom in four vital areas:

- In our schools
- For our churches and other houses of worship
- In our military
- Throughout the public arena (including government and the marketplace)

First Liberty has won cases at all court levels, including the United States Supreme Court and is active across the nation.

Know Your Rights

Download our free **Religious Liberty Protection Kits** at [FirstLiberty.org/Kits](https://www.FirstLiberty.org/Kits) (also available in printed booklets). They are available for:

- Churches
- Ministries
- Christian Schools
- Military Members
- Public School Students and Teachers
- The Workplace

Report a Violation: To report a potential violation of religious liberty, visit [FirstLiberty.org](https://www.FirstLiberty.org).



Endnotes

First Liberty would like to give special acknowledgment to the work of Dr. Rodney Stark, Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University, co-director of the university's Institute for Studies of Religion, and founding editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, and Dr. Patrick Fagan, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Research on Marriage and Religion, and formerly with Family Research Council and The Heritage Foundation. We note that their work, often cited below, includes their own primary research and also aggregates the primary research, most of it in secular peer-reviewed journals, from a multitude of researchers.

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