



(Video capture of Sweetwater police confronting Paul Johnson for reading his Bible out loud on a public sidewalk)

Grandfather Prohibited from Reading the Bible Out Loud on a Public Sidewalk
First Liberty attorneys say city law enforced against client is unconstitutional

SWEETWATER, Tenn.—Today, First Liberty and the Center for Religious Expression (CRE) sent a demand letter to the City of Sweetwater, Tennessee on behalf of their client, Paul Johnson. The letter asks the city to stop using a twenty-five year old city ordinance to prohibit Johnson from reading the Bible on a public sidewalk without a permit.

“Every American has the right to share earnestly-held views in public,” said CRE Chief Counsel Nate Kellum. “No one should need government permission to preach.”

“Mr. Johnson does not need permission from the government to express his faith in public,” said Chelsey Youman, Counsel for First Liberty. “The First Amendment is permission enough for any citizen in any city in America to peacefully read the Bible out loud on a public sidewalk. The Sweetwater ordinance is overbroad, unconstitutional, and must be immediately changed or eliminated.”

In August, police officers in Sweetwater told Mr. Johnson that reading the Bible out loud on a public sidewalk fell within the definition of a “demonstration” pursuant to an outdated city ordinance. As such, Mr. Johnson would need a permit from the city to read the Bible on a public sidewalk. But, when Mr. Johnson applied for a permit, a city official arbitrarily denied his request.

“I was shocked that a city had a law banning anyone from reading the Bible on a public sidewalk without the city’s permission,” said Johnson. “All I want to do is tell people about the love of Jesus by reading my Bible, but I was worried I might be arrested if I tried.”

| To learn more, visit FirstLiberty.org/Johnson.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](https://FirstLiberty.org) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNiel at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.