



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 1, 2011

Man Arrested for Reading Bible in Public

As reported by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Attorneys for Hemet Calvary Chapel say the church’s First Amendments rights were violated by the arrests on Feb. 2 that were captured on video and posted on [YouTube](#).” The paper reports that the church is seeking an injunction and unspecified damages against the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and one of its officers, Darren Meyer, “who arrested an assistant pastor and two church elders when they refused to leave after they were asked by a security guard.”



The church’s assistant pastor, Brett Coronado, was arrested along with church elders Mark Mackey and Edmond Flores, Jr. for trespassing and interfering with public business after the trio was confronted by a security officer at the facility, followed by the CHP officer.

According to the [Riverside Press-Enterprise](#), attorneys for the church warned that the incident raises serious concerns about the freedom of individuals and religious groups to assemble at public places. “They contend that the men’s right to free speech was violated solely because their message was religious,” reported the paper.

Jennifer Monk, an attorney with the group Advocates for Faith and Freedom, which is representing the church, said the case is “as simple as vindicating their constitutional rights and unlawful arrests from what occurred at the DMV that day.”

In the video Mackey can be seen loudly reading from the Bible when a security guard orders him to leave. Ignoring the guard’s instructions, Mackey is then confronted by CHP Officer Meyer, who abruptly handcuffs him and places him in a waiting squad car, while Mackey announces to bystanders witnessing the scene: “This is what the United States is coming to. You can stand here and talk about anything you want, but can’t talk about the Bible.”

Responds Meyer, “You can preach on your own property, you can preach on a street corner, but you’re not allowed to preach here because this is a captive audience.” To which Mackey declares: “The devil’s holding everyone captive to do his will ... including this police officer. Repent.”

A short time later Coronado and Flores were arrested as they questioned CHP officers about what law Mackey had broken. According to the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, the three were later issued citations and released.

Some could argue that the trio of preachers was creating a disturbance — or at least an annoyance — to those doing business at the DMV office. The video shows Mackey intent on loudly reading the Bible to no one in particular, and rebuffing the attempts of one official to address him, before Officer Meyer



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arrives to take him away. Lieutenant Mike Soubirous, a CHP spokesman, told the *Press-Enterprise* that in the past, individuals coming from the church to preach “would get within five to ten feet and literally get in people’s faces. It was animated preaching, like, ‘If you don’t repent, you’ll go to hell.’ It wasn’t a calm nature. It was preaching to them as their captive and telling them what they want to tell them.”

In a press release, Advocates for Faith and Freedom said that while some individuals might legitimately disagree with the approach the men took in offering their Christian message, “we must defend the right to engage in religious speech on public property in all circumstances, or our right to do so will be infringed upon to a greater extent in the future.”

The group called the constitutionally guaranteed right to speak freely on public property “fundamental to our liberty, whether the speech is political or religious in nature. This nation was founded upon the ideas of our founding fathers that were discussed and debated openly in town squares and public places. Any infringement of that right must be defended to the greatest extent possible to preserve the right for future generations.”

Thumbnail photo: Mark Mackey



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