



October 21, 2010

Group Lodges Complaint Against Pastor for Flouting Tax Law

Watchdog group Americans United for Separation of Church and State has lodged an official complaint against Pastor Brad Brandon of the Berean Bible Baptist Church in Hastings, Minn. for allegedly transgressing federal law that prohibits church leaders from openly endorsing or opposing any person running for public office. But the pastor is undaunted and hopes the IRS would take action against him so that he has the opportunity to defend his rights to freedom of speech in open court.

In his sermon on Sunday, Pastor Brandon endorsed 11 candidates (mostly Republican) in their attempts to win their respective elections into various public offices. According to Americans United, the endorsement is a blatant violation of federal law. This law has been in existence for more than half a century ever since the presidency of President Lyndon B. Johnson. This law was passed in 1954 when then Senator Johnson (D-Texas) sponsored the law after pastors criticized him for his personal behavior. The law came to be known as the Johnson Amendment which disallows all tax-exempt organizations like churches from expressing official political partisanship.

Violation of the law may result in a church losing its tax-free status.

On the other hand, Pastor Brandon believes that it is within his constitutional right to express his personal political opinion over the pulpit, including endorse or oppose any candidate. And he is not alone. The practice of 'sermonizing' their political stand has been done by pastors across the nation for the last 3 years in a concerted manner organized by the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF). Usually the last Sunday of September is Pulpit Freedom Sunday, practiced by pastors who believe in their fundamental right to express political opinions. That's what the ADF organizes each year.

Over the last 3 years, Americans United has lodged over 100 complaints against pastors for flouting the Johnson Amendment. But the IRS has dropped the cases after their investigations. No explanations or reasons have been offered.

Pastor Brandon openly endorsed 11 candidates, among who are 9 from the GOP, 1 from the Independence Party and 1 from the Constitutional Party. One of them was the candidate running for governor of Minnesota, Tom Emmer and two running for Congress, namely Reps Michelle Bachmann and John Kline. They are all from the GOP.

Pastor Brandon also listed all of the 11 candidates in the church's website and ended it with the declaration, 'May God be glorified in the upcoming election'.