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Today: Minnesota Fathers Sue Over Christian Tax Ban

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Because of that catch, Minnesota makes these fathers choose between their faith and the benefit. To receive it, they must strip their faith from their children's lessons. To remain faithful, they must go without."

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Two Minnesota fathers sued the state on Monday after Minnesota's K-12 tax benefit shut them out for one reason: the education they give their children is Christian. Nathan Colestock, a pastor and father of four, and Joseph Osburn, a father of six, filed their complaint in the Minnesota Tax Court against Paul Marquart, the state's commissioner of revenue. Between them they are raising ten children - and the state will help pay for a music lesson, but not for a lesson that teaches those children to know and love God.

The two families live in Washington County, and they teach their children through homeschool instruction, Christian co-ops and other programmes rooted in their faith. They believe God calls them to teach their children that way. Minnesota disagrees - at least when it comes to the money.

The state's K-12 Education Subtraction and Credit offsets the cost of tutoring, textbooks, instructional materials and enrichment classes for nearly every Minnesota parent. The one exception is written into the law itself: the instruction cannot be religious.

Minnesota K-12 Tax Benefit Excludes Religious Education

Two Minnesota statutes draw the line. Minn. Stat. § 290.0674, Subd. 1A(b)(2), and Minn. Stat. § 290.0132, Subd. 4, Prevent parents from receiving the assistance when the education is religious.

The complaint puts the choice facing the fathers in plain words: "Because of that catch, Minnesota makes these fathers choose between their faith and the benefit. To receive it, they must strip their faith from their children's lessons. To remain faithful, they must go without."

Their faith forbids the first option. So they go without.

Colestock qualifies for both the education credit and the deduction, but he has not claimed either one because of the religious nature of his childrens' education. Osburn qualifies for the deduction and has likewise left it unclaimed, because claiming it would conflict with what he believes. The lawsuit asks the court to declare the religious exclusion unconstitutional and to stop the state from conditioning the benefit on parents not exercising their faith.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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