

“The whole issue involved here is the Lordship of Jesus Christ over His church, Simon,” drawled the pastor, exiting off of I-74 and pulling on to Highway 32, heading back to the church.

“I can see that in some of the ministries you’ve mentioned, Pastor, like visitation and Sunday School, but I just don’t see it with Day Care,” said the deacon earnestly.

“Simon, if some of our men got together at the church to learn more about God and the Bible, would you say that the state could regulate that?”

“Well, no.”

“How about if the church ladies decided to go to the church and bake cookies to take to nursing homes. Should that activity be regulated?”

“Of course not...”

“What about our teen activities? Should there be a police officer at their activities to make sure no vandalism is done?”

“No.”

“Then how about our children between the ages one and five? Does the state have the right to come to our church and regulate how we train them, any more than they have the right to come into our homes?”

“I see where you’re going, Pastor, but I think it wouldn’t hurt just to let them come and inspect.”

“What if they wanted to come and inspect your home, Simon?”

“Well that’s different. They don’t have any right to come in and inspect my home.”

“The Right to Privacy dictates that you have the right to be secure in your property and in your papers. Most people think a church is public property, because everybody is welcome to come. In reality, a church is private property. Who does our church property belong to?”

“Us, the members of the church, I guess.”

“And did we tithe to ourselves, or did we tithe to God?”

The deacon thought with a puzzled look on his face. “To God...”

“So, whose money bought the property?”

“God’s money did.”

“So, who owns the property?”

“Okay, that’s logical. It’s God’s property. But still there are state laws governing all Day Cares, even church Day Cares.”

“Only those who volunteer to be under those laws,” said the pastor.

“I just don’t get it. We can’t choose which laws to be under and which laws not to be under.”

“Simon, you were in the Army, weren’t you?”

“Yes, but wha...”

“How did you get under military law?”

“I suppose I’m supposed to say ‘When I took the oath?’”

“Actually, when you volunteered and took the oath. Let me ask you: if a general passed you today, would you salute him?”

A smile crossed the deacon’s face. “No, I suppose not.”

“The reason was that you chose not to stay under military law. Well, we as a church have chosen not to come under the laws which regulate corporations of the state. I can say that if we were an incorporated church, a part of that contract would be to let them in to inspect. Let me give you an illustration. We have shown the church people movies, haven’t we?”

“Yes. I run the projector myself.”

“When we show those movies, should I get the state authorities out to the church to inspect the auditorium to make sure it qualifies as a movie theater? Should we get lighted aisles, ushers with flashlights, have the projector so many feet in the air, and have the building occupancy placed on the door?”

“Of course not... We’re not a theater.”

“Simon, we’re not a Day Care,” said the pastor as he turned into the church parking lot.

Had Pastor Hancock not been engaged in such a serious conversation with his deacon, he would have seen the lights from the police cars long before now. As he pulled his car up next to the vehicles, he saw a total of eight uniformed officers, along with four other people, one of whom he recognized as Camille Johnson.

Simon’s face turned ashen as he took in the whole sight. The deacon felt that undoubtedly someone in the school was seriously injured or ill. He looked, but found no ambulance, presuming one had already left the scene.

Both men got out of the car and approached the officers. The burly sergeant from the Sheriff’s office turned to meet the men.

“Are you Pastor Hancock,” asked the deputy as roughly as he had spoken with Mary Sanders earlier in the church.

“Who wants to know that information,” asked the preacher, looking the much larger policeman square in the eyes.

“I am Sergeant Booker. I have a warrant for your arrest, Hancock.”

“On what charges,” demanded the man of God.

“Hancock, you have been charged with child abuse and molestation. Will you turn around and place your hands on the building?”

The pastor turned, and, seeing several of the students and teachers looking out the windows at this scene, turned back to the officer in charge.

“I will not, Sergeant. If you are going to arrest me, fine. But I will not let you humiliate me in front of the people of God whom I minister to. You’ll not frisk me, and you’ll not handcuff me. I promise to come peaceably, but if you go the other route, I will fight you right her on God’s property.”

The sergeant quickly unsnapped the piece of leather on his holster, freeing his firearm for use. The face of the man showed his hatred for not being obeyed. His right hand quickly wrapped around the handle of his 357 Magnum revolver.

Another hand from behind was placed over the sergeant’s hand as an officer in dark blue moved in front of the deputy. The State Trooper stared into the deputy’s face while his left hand still held Booker’s right.

“Sergeant, would you go and wait in your squad car?” The quiet, but firm tone of the trooper, along with the icy stare of his blue eyes, convinced the county officer that he had indeed gone to far.

“I have jurisdiction here, Leland.”

“You just lost your temper and your jurisdiction, Booker.”

The three other troopers surrounded the deputies. With a huff, the sergeant turned and stomped off toward his car.

The State Trooper turned to face the pastor.

“Sir, I am Captain Leland of the State Police. Please forgive the brashness of the Sergeant. It seems some badges outweigh the people that wear them. I ask you this question realizing that you have the right not to answer it. Are you Pastor Hancock?”

“Yes, I am Pastor Robert Hancock.”

“Pastor, this is a county matter. We were just called as backup. This deputy has a warrant for your arrest, signed by a judge. If you prefer, I would be willing to drive you to the county courthouse myself. If you choose to come peaceably, no harm or humiliation will occur.”

“Thank you, Captain. Could I have a few moments of preparation?”

“Certainly, Pastor.”

The preacher turned and called Mary Sanders over to where he was standing.

“Mary, get hold of Lee,” he whispered. “Tell him what happened. Call Dr. Ryker. Tell him I need him to come. Call our church people. Have them come to the church to meet with Lee and Dr. Ryker as soon as he gets here in town. In my desk is an envelope marked ‘DEFENSE’. Buy Dr. Ryker’s plane ticket with money out of that envelope. Remember the number one rule. ‘Mouth closed... church open.’ Tell everybody the rule over and over again.”

The pastor turned and followed Officer Leland to his car. The captain opened the passenger door for the preacher, and went around and stepped into the driver’s side. With no sirens or lights, the police cars left the parking lot, heading for the downtown area. Meanwhile, inside the building, teachers and students filed into the church auditorium in order to pray for God’s protection to be upon their pastor.

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The entire House Chamber buzzed with the voices of over a thousand people crammed into it. The people sitting in the balcony, where visitors to the House normally sat to watch bills presented on the floor, could look out over the vast chamber and see rows and rows of desks with plush chairs behind each desk. The fortunate ones who came early enough to garner one of the nice Representative chairs were the envy of those who were crushed into place in the balcony.

House Pages and assistants to the House Doorkeeper could be seen busily placing folding chairs along the sides of the floor of the House Chamber, and for each chair placed, a body quickly sat down in the chair.

For this special hearing, the Senate Doorkeeper was there at the entrance of the House floor stationing himself across from the House Doorkeeper. This let the people know that easy entrance to the floor was now impossible. The only people being let in

these doors were those recognizable to these two men, and that meant only senators and representative, or a few staff people.

The side balconies were overflowing with television cameras and news people from every media in town. Camera operators conversed and helped on another with final touches on their equipment. The print media all gathered in an area, already beginning their articles with preliminary facts about the hearing. Computer notebooks were clicking away as observations were being saved for when final drafts would be written.

Security people watched the crowded halls outside the first and second floor entrances to the House Chamber. Their transmitters kept each guard in contact with one another and the central security room on the first floor. The crowd, though large, was notably well mannered, unlike some demonstrations the guards had experienced in past years at the Capitol.

The media liaison announced to the people in the hallways on both floors that monitors were being placed in several of the smaller committee rooms in the building. Her staffers, the ones with blue blazers on, were placed outside these rooms to usher the overflow crowd out of the congested halls. Many people chose to watch the proceedings on a monitor in one of the rooms, while others still waited for the opportunity to be let in to fill the few remaining chairs still being placed in the back of the Chamber.

The nine state senators had entered from side doors to the Chamber at various times, but were now all seated at desks on the dais facing the crowd. A few of the senators waved to people in the crowd, or spoke to one another lightheartedly. Some poured over their notes on the desk before them. The chairman spoke with the young Pages, letting them know of their responsibilities of running messages and filling water glasses for the committee.

One lone, eight foot table had been placed at the front of the room with a single chair behind the table, facing the committee. This is where the nominee would be sitting shortly.

Lee Jackson pressed his way up against a large window next to the main entrance which looked into the House Chamber. He gazed at the backs of hundreds of heads, trying to see where Laura was sitting. He saw several ladies with dark brown hair which could have been her, and now realized his chance of getting to sit close to her was a near impossibility. He turned to leave just as the judge and his party worked their way through the crowd to the entrance.

A very impatient Doorkeeper stopped the group.

“Excuse me, but you can’t go in there.”

“If I don’t, you’ll have to send everyone home. I’m Judge Jones.”

“Oh, I’m sorry Your Honor. I didn’t recognize you in this crowd. You and your people can go on in. Your seats are roped off for you all up front. I’m very sorry.”

“Thank you.” The judge smiled to the man responsible for all who enter the House Floor.

Lee saw Laura not even five feet away from him. She looked over at him, and upon recognizing him, flashed a smile. He stuck out his hand to shake hers.

“I’ll be praying with you, Laura.”

She reached out to take his hand in hers and then pulled him along with her as she passed the Senate Doorkeeper.

“Judge Jones’ staff,” was all she said to the man as she continued to lead a surprised Lee into the Chamber.

“Laura, I’m not on the Judge’s staff,” he whispered to her as they entered the back of the room.

“Sorry, my mistake,” she replied. “But now that you’re in, you might as well come and sit down.”

As they moved up the center aisle, they could hear Fran, barking orders to the House Pages assigned to take care of the nominee’s needs. How efficient she seemed. Having spent years with the judge gave her an understanding of how he wanted things done. She was ever faithful to the task of preparing his surroundings in order to make him comfortable.

Judge Jones approached his secretary at the front of the room and whispered something to her. Immediately, two more Pages were commanded to bring four more chairs to be placed behind the table where the judge would be sitting.

Lee sat down in the front row, behind the third desk from the middle aisle, and Laura sat next to him.

“What’s he doing?” Lee whispered to his friend.

“I believe he’s not going to face the committee alone,” she replied.

Fran took the chair next to the aisle, by Laura. She gave Lee a puzzled look as she sat down.

Laura leaned over to her. “He’s a friend.”

Fran smiled and gave Lee a nod.

Judge Jones sat in the middle chair behind the table with his wife on his right side and Katie next to her. On his left were his two sons, the oldest next to him and Brad on the end. Some of the senators gave confused looks at the arrangement of the nominee’s table, as this was an unusual sight for a one man hearing. The committee chairman glanced to his female colleague directly to his left and shrugged his shoulders.

All attention was diverted to the right side of the House Chamber as the Governor entered the room with a large smile plastered on his face. He shook hands with people along the front row and waved to those seated farther back. There was “charisma” enough to go around as even those in the balcony were treated with waves and blown kisses from the highest executive of the state.

After shaking hands with Lee, Laura, and Fran, the man moved to the nominee’s table and kissed Katie’s hand, Nancy’s cheek, and spent a moment talking with the judge. It was not hard to notice Nancy’s hard look and red face as she turned away from the Governor and sat back down in her seat. The judge introduced him to his sons as the Governor shook their hands with both of his.

All eyes followed the man as he made his way to the front of the committee’s table and leaned over to whisper something to the chairman. Grabbing a microphone, he turned, stepped off the platform, and raised his right hand to quiet the crowd.