

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
First Amendment Freedom Filter (15–20 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

Students review examples showing that the First Amendment protects speech and expression, but does not protect acts that physically harm people, steal from them, damage their property, or violate *their* rights.

Instructions

1. Have students complete the handout, then discuss in pairs or groups of three (give students 8–10 minutes to complete this part, maybe longer if they’re having lively discussions!).
2. Review the answers together.

Suggested Key (Student Answers Might Vary)

1. Punish It – Hacking and destroying another group’s files violates property rights.
2. Protect It – Political criticism is protected speech.
3. Punish It – Breaking windows is property destruction.
4. Protect It – Offensive criticism is still speech.
5. Punish It – Fraud and theft are not protected speech.
6. Protect It – Peaceful protest is protected expression.
7. Protect It – The person is using his own property.
8. Punish It – Graffiti on another person’s property is vandalism.
9. Protect It – Insulting government officials is protected speech.
10. Punish It – Trespassing violates property rights.
11. Protect It – Publishing opinions about laws is protected.
12. Protect It – Peaceful public expression is protected.

Debrief/Wrap-Up Questions

1. Which situations involved only speech or expression?
2. Which situations involved violating another person’s rights?
3. Why is it important to distinguish between offensive speech and criminal conduct?
4. Should speech lose protection simply because many people dislike it?
5. What principle seems to separate the “Protect It” answers from the “Punish It” answers?

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview. First Amendment Freedom Filter

For each scenario, decide whether the government should:

- A. PROTECT IT (The First Amendment protects it, even if it is offensive, rude, unpopular, or hateful.)
- B. PUNISH IT (The government may punish it because the act involves force, theft, property damage, fraud, trespassing, or some other violation of another person's rights.)

Scenarios:

1. A political organization hacks into a rival group's computer system and deletes files to silence opposing views.
2. A newspaper publishes an editorial calling Congress corrupt and incompetent.
3. A protest group breaks store windows during a demonstration.
4. A blogger publishes harsh criticism of a mayor and uses rude language.
5. Someone creates fake charity advertisements, collects donations, and keeps the money.
6. A group of protesters peacefully carry signs that many citizens find offensive.
7. A citizen burns his own political poster on his own property to make a statement.
8. An activist spray-paints political slogans on the wall of a privately owned building without permission.
9. A radio host insults a governor and calls his policies foolish.
10. A group of activists enters a private business after being told to leave and refuses to leave.
11. A magazine publishes an article arguing that a popular law should be repealed.
12. A protester uses a megaphone to express unpopular opinions in a public park.

