

Religious Businesspersons and Their Present Dilemma



By Joshua Stucki

(Former full-time business owner for 14 years)

Restoration Movement Literature

This booklet may be distributed freely in its original, unmodified form.

Approximately 6.6% of all Americans are self-employed.ⁱ

At least 80% of all small business startups fail. Some estimate the number as high as 93%.ⁱⁱ

So, to be both self-employed *and successful* is very rare. Consider also that most small businesses are self-funded, either from savings, or credit cards, or loans from friends and family, and you can see the financial (and personal) disaster that awaits most people who wander into self-employment. The few who succeed usually make middle-class incomes while working 60+ hours a week, 7 days a week, every week of the year. The multi-million success stories are of course most common in the news media, but the least common in the actual real world!

Now imagine your very hard-fought and unlikely success is *destroyed overnight* because the social winds of a nation have changed. This is happening all over the United States right now:

Endless stories of bakeries, photographers, embroidery shops, caterers and other businesses are being shuttered because they will not participate in a specific activity – a gay wedding – as it is against their conscious (most of the time religious belief) to do so.

The irony is that discrimination against people is **not occurring**. Instead, what is happening is Discrimination against specific activities which was completely legal (until the definition for discrimination was changed). For example: if a gay person wanted their individual photo taken, or a birthday cake made, or to eat at a restaurant, or to have a work shirt embroidered, no one would or should do (or is doing) that, as that is discrimination against someone merely for who they are (the old, long-standing, legal definition of discrimination).

No, what religious (Christian, or Muslim – see below) businesses are doing is refusing to participate in a specific activity – a gay wedding. Should a person who finds pornography repulsive (for any reason) be forced to do a pornographic photo shoot, or should a religious computer contractor be forced to edit a pornographic video? No. There is no personal discrimination going on here; rather, discrimination against participating in a specific activity is all that is occurring, but this long-standing legal definition is being almost universally ignored.ⁱⁱⁱ

The overwhelming impression (based on the news media) is that it is Christian bakeries, photographers, caterers, and embroidery shops that are refusing service. Certainly, some are, but did you know that Muslim shops are refusing service as well?^{iv}

Naturally, the Muslims are refusing service, as their problem with participating in a specific activity – a gay wedding – is the same as a Christian's. It is against a Christian's religious beliefs, as it is theirs. Calling Christians "bigoted" for honoring their consciences is no different than calling Muslims the same. Yet, naturally, this is virtually absent from news telecasts. It would probably be a PR disaster.

As well, could anyone really estimate the potential conservative-Muslim reaction? "Jihad" would not be out of the question.

It is probably no accident, of course, that those who want religious businesspeople to cater their gay weddings purposefully target Christians. Everyone knows that chance of a violent reaction is virtually none, and right now it is very easy to sue and make a good chunk of money from any Christian business that refuses to service a gay wedding. Whereas, if they were to target and sue a Muslim bakery – it may not be Muslim bakery itself that retaliates – but who could really sleep at night? Who

would not be in fear of some Muslim retaliating violently at one their own sued by a “sinner”, in their minds?

Also, a contradiction occurs if one tries to have a “pro-traditional marriage” cake, embroidery, or photographic shoot done by a gay baker, embroiderer, or photographer – they refuse.^v

Therefore, the issue here is not “equality”, or “tolerance”, but forced acceptance, participation, and even celebration of another person’s views. By definition, this cannot be free speech or the free exercise of religion.

As a parent, this is one of the most common circumstances of any day of the week: if one kid receives a bigger cookie, he or she does not shout “no fair!” No, they revel in the fact that they have a bigger cookie, maybe even flaunting it to the kids who have a smaller cookie! No, it is always – absolutely always – the kid with the smaller cookie that shouts “no fair!” Fairness is never a matter of making sure you have the same as others (positive or negative); it is always a matter of making sure nobody has more than you do or having more than they do!

Jesus covers this concept in the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20). The workers who got there early agreed to work for a certain wage and they were paid that wage upon the finishing of their work, just as promised. However, the later workers received the same pay. This made the earlier workers upset, so they complained to he who paid them what they agreed to get paid. The conclusion to the parable is simple: “Don’t I have a right to do what I want with my own money?”^{vi}

Indeed, private business owners do have a right to do with their own money what they please!

I too was a business owner for 14 years. I was in computers, not a particularly-controversial enterprise. Yet, I ran into half a dozen compromising situations where I refused service *based on my religious beliefs*. Every time, the person involved understood. I made an effort to be very courteous and explain succinctly why I could not help:

1) I was asked to help an amateur pornographer edit one of his movies. I refused because I am a Christian. I knew (and he knew) there was nobody else in town with those skills at the time. Nonetheless, he understood and left. This happened in 2003. Sometimes I wonder if I could have been forced to look at and assist this pornographer in his sinful activities in today's culture.

2) I was asked by a pornography shop one time to come to their stop (in the middle of the day, no less, with my car parked up front) to fix their cash register system. I refused, based on my religious beliefs, but also my personal reputation that I did not want people thinking I went to porn shops! I was also a volunteer youth sponsor and pulpit supply preacher at the time; can you imagine the harm that would have done to my potential career if I would have been spotted? The business owner understood, however, and called someone out of town to come (at extra expense to him). I wonder if in today's culture I would have been persecuted for refusing service.

3) A local Mormon meeting house one time called me to come in and fix their computers. I refused, as I was a part-time Christian minister at the time (yes, Mormons call themselves Christians, but the majority of conservative Christians do not), and felt like I would be helping to advance (and profiting from) a cause I was directly, personally, religiously, and vocationally opposed to. Thankfully, they understood, and again called someone from out of town at their own expense to

come in and help them. I wonder, again, if in today's culture I could have been sued out of business.

4) Another previous client of mine was so difficult – verbally abusive, very demanding – that I refused service after a few months. Some would say this example is not relevant, but I had no excuse other than “I did not want to serve them” to refuse them service. Would I be protected if I was sued in court from them? Some would say yes, others would say possibly not, but is not just sad we even have to ask the question? Is not capitalism built on the idea of a mutually beneficial relationship in any particular transaction?

What if I would have had a gay wedding couple or planner come in and they would have wanted me to edit their wedding video? (With my name as the publisher, no less) What if they would have wanted me to come and set up their computer equipment for a DJ for their gay wedding, or help them design their invitations? Personally, I am so grateful I am out of business now. I would be naïve to think the above situations would not have been at my doorstep!

I have other examples, but my point is clear: if a businessperson does not have the right to exercise their conscience in business, then it is not just Christians and gay weddings that are going to be in court; it will be anyone with a conscience against a particular activity that could be forced to act against their better judgment or be shuttered out of operation.

Our there any answers to these problems for Christian businessmen and women?

1) Pray. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 18:1 – “He told them this parable so they would pray and not give up.” (NIV) Our regular prayer offered up together, can and will make a difference.

2) Expose the hypocrisy *kindly*. The footnotes at the end of this booklet have multiple links to various websites anyone can look up that show how it is not an equal playing field for Christians (and Muslims) and the gay rights activists.

3) You can legally refuse service to everyone for a particular activity to avoid participating in a compromising one. This is naturally not an option for a cake baker who relies heavily on wedding business, or a photographer who primarily does weddings. Nonetheless, I could have stopped editing videos (a minor part of my business) in computers, or a photographer could try school photography instead (again, these are just suggestions – as a former businessperson – I would never pretend to know what is really best for another businessperson).

4) Support those who are fighting these battles now. Spread their stories *kindly*, the hypocrisy involved *kindly*, and if possible, help fund their grassroots campaigns to get the word out.

5) Plan ahead: develop a second skill in case you need it to make a living and seek out your legal options in advance (they vary by state presently). One cardinal rule of small business is that the only person who knows your business as well as you is you. You need to be prepared for potential difficulties down the road.

Some will finally ask if there is any Biblical precedence for “refusing service” to gays. Indeed, there is:

Genesis 19:4-7 says:

“⁴Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

⁶Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing.”
(NIV)

Lot was courteous! Lot called them “friends!” Yet, Lot refused them service. The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:7 called Lot “righteous” precisely because he refused the gay men of that town their desire!

Perhaps more disturbing was the gay men’s response in Genesis 19:9 (very telling):

“⁹“Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.” (NIV)

When a gay couple uses the force of Law to force a religious person (Christian or Muslim) into violating their consciences, are they acting any better than the gay men of Sodom and Gomorrah? They viewed Lot as a man whose rights *were less than their own* and were going to force down his door (i.e. business) to get what they wanted.

Everyone knows what happened for their actions. The “sodomy” laws in every state and in our nation are named after the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Will the same judgment come upon them? Unfortunately, this is an absolute affirmative:

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men.” 1 Corinthians 6:9 (NIV)

It is outside of the context of this particular study to go into a more full discussion of how the Bible views homosexuality. However, particular interpretations are also irrelevant to this discussion!

The point is that if a private business owner cannot have equal say in what transactions they will or will not participate in, whatever the reason, then “private” business has died, and the business owner who has poured great risk, very hard work, and beat all the odds can be taken down overnight by someone who merely disagrees with them over a transaction.

Some would say, “So you would support a racist business! What if a person could refuse black people just for being black?”

This is answered easily by two points:

1) When a religious (Christian or Muslim) business owner refuses service to a gay couple over a wedding cake, photo shoot, or embroidery, they are not refusing to serve the person – they are refusing to be a participant in what they view as sin. If that same person wanted a birthday cake, a personal photo (not pornographic), or other non-gay wedding related item done, that is not a problem, because they are not refusing the person! Instead, the issue with gay weddings is not the people, but rather the forced participation in something they view as wrong. Hence why a gay cake maker certainly wants the right to refuse to make pro-traditional marriage cakes! If that same person wanted a birthday cake, this would be no problem, because it is not personal

discrimination at that point. They are not being asked to participate in an activity they deem offensive.

2) Secondly, the free market necessarily takes care of this problem in our society (though it is rarely given the chance to). If a business owner put a “whites only” sign in their window, how long would they survive? Would you go to that restaurant? I would not, and neither would you. With no government intervention required, that business would shut its doors. We spoke with our personal freedom, not by force of law, and what was right was still accomplished. Christian businesses should survive on their ability to compete in a free market, not based on social issues.

Certainly, this is just the beginning of this debate. Nonetheless, it is a very relevant debate and a great concern to religious (Christian or Muslim) business owners everywhere. This previous business owner is praying for you, our opponents in this cultural war, that more than anything, everybody can come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

God absolutely loves everyone (John 3:16). Nonetheless, His wrath must come upon sin. Let us love, witness, share, and endure, to gain the crown of life promised us! (Revelation 2:10)

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ⁱⁱ <http://www.businessinsider.com/startup-odds-of-success-2013-5>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2015/04/06/gay-woman-who-donated-20-to-christian-owned-indiana-pizzeria-reveals-why-she-took-bold-stand/>

^{iv} <http://www.westernjournalism.com/hidden-camera-gay-wedding-cake-muslim-bakery/>

^v <http://shoebat.com/2014/12/12/christian-man-asks-thirteen-gay-bakeries-bake-pro-traditional-marriage-cake-denied-service-watch-shocking-video/>

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