

What the Hobby Lobby Victory Really Means for Religious Liberty

The United States Supreme Court on Monday affirmed our nation's historic understanding of religious liberty by providing an exception to the abortifacient mandate that had been handed down by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Affordable Care Act.

The mandate requires employers to pay for drugs to which many Americans morally object. The department made no accommodation whatsoever for businesses closely-held by people of deep religious conviction, such as Conestoga Wood Specialties of Lancaster County and Hobby Lobby of Oklahoma. The confiscatory fines proposed by the administration threatened to drive those who objected to the mandate out of business ownership entirely.

Barbara Green, co-founder of Hobby Lobby:

"Our family is overjoyed by the Supreme Court's decision. Today the nation's highest court has re-affirmed the vital importance of religious liberty as one of our country's founding principles. The Court's decision is a victory, not just for our family business, but for all who seek to live out their faith. We are grateful to God and to those who have supported us on this difficult journey."

Dr. George O. Wood, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God and licensed to practice law before SCOTUS:

"The Court should be commended for recognizing that individuals do not surrender their religious freedom rights when they incorporate as a closely held, for profit business. A family-owned business—even a for-profit corporation such as

Hobby Lobby—has religious freedom rights because members of the family do. A ruling against Hobby Lobby would've meant that the government could require pro-life business owners to provide abortion-inducing drugs to their employees through company health plans. That unconscionable conclusion is—thankfully—avoided by today's ruling.”

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference:

“By ruling in favor of Hobby Lobby, the Supreme Court affirmed the distinct God-given right of conscience and religious freedom, which empowers the individual to embrace life, advance liberty and pursue happiness without having to sacrifice faith or conscience on the altar of expediency. For that matter, I do believe that while this outcome validates this fundamental right, the many threats in both culture and society make religious liberty the quintessential civil rights issue of the 21st century. For people of faith, this decision requires both celebration and a renewed commitment to vigilance, as today's complacency is tomorrow's captivity.”

Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel of the ACLJ:

“This is a landmark decision protecting religious freedom and freedom of conscience. The court clearly recognized that closely-held corporations enjoy religious liberty rights just as they enjoy rights to free speech. American citizens do not lose their religious freedom when they form a corporation and try to live out their religious values in the conduct of their business. Moreover, the court—by holding that closely-held corporations cannot be forced to directly subsidize abortion-pills—dealt a severe blow to the Obama Administration's ongoing assault on religious liberty and represents a significant setback to the abortion industry.”

U.S. Representative Randy Hultgren (IL-14):

“Freedom to follow one's conscience, faith and deeply held

moral convictions is at the heart of our country's identity, and I am pleased the Supreme Court defended Americans' fundamental liberties. Americans don't give up those freedoms when they open a family business or enter the workplace, and the federal government should not force anyone to choose between violating their deeply held moral convictions or facing burdensome fines and potential bankruptcy. As the federal government hands down more and more mandates on Americans, protecting individual liberty becomes even more crucial to ensuring a free society. A victory for the religious liberty of some is a victory for all."

Rick Santorum, former U.S. Senator and CEO of EchoLight Studios"

"The Supreme Court's ruling on Obamacare's contraception mandate is a tremendous victory for our freedom of conscience. I'm proud of the Green and Hahn families for holding true to their core convictions and standing up to Obamacare's intrusive contraception and abortion coverage mandate. The Hobby Lobby and the Conestoga Wood Specialties businesses were built on people living out the American dream, and their owners should not have to check their religious beliefs at the door. For the moment, the Court has restored a vital piece of the Constitution that President Obama, Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi attempted to deny working Americans 'the free exercise' of religion. Today is a great day for all Americans."

Brian Fisher, president and co-founder of Online for Life:

"I applaud the Supreme Court for ruling in favor of private companies and their owners to exercise their freedom of religion. No person or entity should be forced to provide baby-killing drugs to their employees. My hope and prayer is that our government will take further steps to stop the ongoing killing of unborn children. Let's return to a country that genuinely abides by its own Declaration of Independence and protects the right to live for every American human

being.”

National Association of Evangelicals President Leith Anderson:

“This is a big step toward preserving and deepening America’s religious pluralism. RFRA creates a level playing field for people from every faith, ensuring that Americans need not abandon their convictions when they open a school, charity or family business. The beauty of the American system is that it protects all Americans, not just those who adhere to the prevailing orthodoxies of the time,” Anderson said. “The wisdom of Congress in approving the Religious Freedom Restoration Act 20 years ago has also been reaffirmed.”

Attorney Charles W. Proctor, III:

“Today’s ruling will permit families like the Hahns of Conestoga Wood Specialties to continue running their businesses in accordance with their values. No one should have to choose between their faith and full participation in the life of our society. Today’s decision affirms this basic principle of a free society.”

Pope Francis: Communists Are Closet Christians

Pope Francis, whose criticisms of unbridled capitalism have prompted some to label him a Marxist, said in an interview published on Sunday that communists had stolen the flag of Christianity.

The 77-year-old pontiff gave an interview to *Il Messaggero*, Rome’s local newspaper, to mark the feast of Saints Peter and

Paul, a Roman holiday.

He was asked about a blog post in the *Economist* magazine that said he sounded like a Leninist when he criticized capitalism and called for radical economic reform.

“I can only say that the communists have stolen our flag. The flag of the poor is Christian. Poverty is at the center of the gospel,” he said, citing Biblical passages about the need to help the poor, the sick and the needy.

“Communists say that all this is communism. Sure, twenty centuries later. So when they speak, one can say to them: ‘but then you are Christian,’ ” he said, laughing.

Since his election in March 2013, Francis has often attacked the global economic system as being insensitive to the poor and not doing enough to share wealth with those who need it most.

Earlier this month, he criticized the wealth made from financial speculation as intolerable and said speculation on commodities was a scandal that compromised the poor’s access to food.

Reporting by Philip Pullella; Editing by Stephen Powell

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Israeli Forces Find Bodies of

Three Missing Teens in Israel

Israeli forces found the bodies of three missing teenagers in the occupied West Bank on Monday after a nearly three-week-long search and a sweep against the Islamist Hamas group that Israel says abducted them.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summoned his security cabinet for a special session that could decide on stronger military moves against Hamas, which has neither confirmed nor denied the Israeli allegations.

“There can be no forgiveness for the killers of children and those who sent them. Now is the time to act,” Economy Minister Naftali Bennett said in a statement.

The kidnapping on June 12 of the three Jewish seminary students near a settlement in the West Bank appalled Israelis who rallied behind the teens’ families.

Netanyahu seized on the abduction to demand Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas abrogate a reconciliation deal he reached with Hamas, his long-time rival, in April that led to a unity Palestinian government on June 2.

The bodies of Gil-Ad Shaer and national Naftali Fraenkel, both 16, and Eyal Yifrah, 19, were found in a field near Hebron, a militant stronghold and the hometown of two Hamas members identified by Israel as the kidnappers and still at large, security officials said.

The teens had apparently been shot soon after having been abducted while hitchhiking, the officials said

“They were under a pile of rocks, in an open field,” said Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Lerner, a military spokesman.

Israeli media said the break in the case came after the relatives of the alleged abductors were interrogated. A large

number of troops gathered at the spot—in the general area where the teenagers disappeared—to recover the bodies.

In tandem with the search over the past 18 days, Israeli forces have raided Palestinian towns and villages, detaining Hamas activists and closing the group's institutions.

Abbas condemned the abduction and pledged the cooperation of his security forces, drawing criticism from Hamas and undercutting his popularity among Palestinians angered by what they saw as his collusion with Israel.

The United States, while condemning the kidnapping, has urged Israel to pursue a measured response.

Hamas, which has maintained security control of the Gaza Strip since the unity deal, is shunned by the West over its refusal to renounce violence. The group has called for Israel's destruction, although various officials have at times indicated a willingness to negotiate a long-term ceasefire.

Additional reporting by Ori Lewis; Editing by Robin Pomeroy

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Compelling Story of Mom Who Refused to Abort Conjoined Twins Wins Journalism Award

Rachel Aldrich's compelling story of a couple who refused to abort conjoined twins during a high-risk pregnancy won the

\$5,000 first-place prize in Christian Life Missions' inaugural presentation of the Walker Journalism Award.

The Walker Journalism Award honors the life and legacy of Christian journalism pioneer Robert Walker and encourages students to use the media to articulate the Christian message. Walker was founder both of *Christian Life* magazine and Christian Life Missions, sponsor of the prize.

The second-place \$2,500 scholarship was awarded to Derek Kim of Michigan State for an editorial on the cultural wars in the student newspaper *The State News*. His piece criticized a state court's ruling that struck down a Michigan ban on same-sex marriage.

Third place went to Oral Roberts University student McKensie Garber for a feature in the student paper *The Oracle* about a couple who married knowing the groom was dying of cancer. Garber's prize is \$1,500.

The award will be an annual undertaking of the nonprofit—which is affiliated with Charisma Media, publisher of *Charisma* and other magazines plus a large library of Christian books in both English and Spanish—said Steve Strang, president of Christian Life Missions and founder and CEO of Charisma Media.

Aldrich, a rising senior at Patrick Henry College in Virginia, wrote in *WORLD* magazine how Kristi and Dave Eskelund of North Carolina chose life for their unborn daughters in 2001 despite the pregnancy's carrying what doctors called "off-the-chart risk." Following their birth, surgery to separate the conjoined twins was successful. However, the weaker child, Aneka Mercy, died at the age of six months. The other girl, Lydia Joy, was still thriving in excellent health at age 12.

In his op-ed column, Kim wrote that government had no business interfering in the covenant relationship of marriage, which predates formation of the United States or any other civil government for that matter. "So when a judge says this

violates the equal protection of the law, he or she is putting him or herself in the place of God—he is perverting the constitution,” Kim wrote. That is because law is based on morality, and all morality is based on theology, he argued.

During the summer break after Jordan Lewis and Cady Kendall, both juniors at Oral Roberts, began dating in 2011, Lewis was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer of the sinus, according to Garber’s account. He had surgery, then endured radiation and chemotherapy, which put the cancer into remission for 18 months. However, in May 2013, it came back in his head and metastasized to both lungs. That was when Cady suggested they get married right away. Their happy union lasted nine months.

Jordan went home to be with the Lord on March 20. Five days later, in an invitation to friends to celebrate his life, Cady wrote this: “I didn’t lose my husband to cancer. I watched him choose his victory to be with Jesus after fighting with the purest bravery.”

Walker was the first publisher to receive the prestigious Magazine Publishers Award from the Evangelical Christian Publisher Association in 1994. He passed away on March 1, 2008, but leaves an eternal legacy for current and future generations called to Christian journalism.

Walker established the Robert Walker Scholarship Fund to help young Christians whom God has called into Christian journalism with their college education. This year’s award marks the transition of the scholarship to a writing competition. Strang said the scholarship fund “helps young people who are devoting their lives to proclaiming the Gospel through the media, which is the legacy that Robert Walker leaves.”

ISIS Declares: The Caliphate Is Here

The terrorist group that has conquered large areas of Iraq and Syria has declared their territory an Islamic caliphate, and they're demanding the support of Muslims all over the world.

The Sunni al-Qaida breakaway group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has renamed itself the "Islamic State," ringing in a "new era of jihad."

On Sunday, they called on the world's Muslims to pledge obedience to their leader, or "caliph," Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

The move could set off in-fighting between ISIS fighters and less militant Sunnis who joined them to take down the Iraqi government.

In the meantime, Iraqi's military is stepping up its defense against ISIS with the help of the United States.

"Clearly, I see ISIS as a direct threat to the United States," Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., told CBS' *Face the Nation*. "They have the capacity, and I believe they have the intent."

"They have stated it in terms of their opposition to the whole Western world. They are the richest, most powerful and most savage group of terrorists in the history of mankind," he warned.

Meanwhile, there are already reports of fighting between Muslim factions for control of border crossings between those two countries.

WATCH: Brown vs. Vines, the 'Gay Christian' Debate You've Waited For

Biblical Christians and the LGBT movement—in its various incarnations—spend lots of time talking past each other and not much engaging one another.

But that all changed on Saturday.

On June 28, Matthew Vines, the Harvard student-turned-face of the “gay Christian” movement, squared off against biblical apologist Dr. Michael Brown on Moody Radio’s “Up for Debate” program.

The question: Can you be gay and Christian?

Vines, 24, claimed that the Bible has nothing to say about committed, monogamous, loving same-sex relationships, and that its clear admonitions against homosexual relations don’t apply to Christians today.

The Core Issue: Interpreting the Bible Through Me, or Interpreting Me Through the Bible

“It’s harmful for gay Christians to ask them to basically avoid any kind of romantic intimacy for their entire lives because their sexuality is irredeemably broken,” Vines stated early in the debate.

But Brown argued that Vines, a professing evangelical, bases his whole analysis off the wrong foundation.

“Very fundamentally, we can interpret the Bible through the lens of our sexuality, as Matthew’s doing, very overtly saying that’s how he’s done it in his own life, or we can interpret our sexuality through the lens of the Bible,” said Brown.

“You come to radically different conclusions. The Gospel, according to Jesus, if we want to follow Him, starts with, ‘deny yourself, take up the cross and follow me,’ not, ‘affirm yourself’ and now make the Gospel fit into that. And it’s a very peculiar idea that the Bible can very explicitly speak against something, but if you do it repeatedly in a loving relationship, somehow it becomes good. No, that’s not the case.”

Vines’ Celibacy Dilemma: All or Nothing?

Vines’ frustration was with the idea that, for professing Christians who identify as gay, the only real option is lifelong celibacy. For Vines, this is unfair and therefore cannot be the ultimate teaching of Scripture. But Brown’s response was different.

“You cannot judge the message by our reaction to it,” Brown noted, citing the story of the young man found in Mark 10. In that passage, Jesus has a rather “unfair” message for the rich young ruler: “Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (v. 21). The man walks away depressed. Brown made the point that the man’s reaction to Christ’s command didn’t invalidate the orders given, then, transitioning back to the topic of homosexuality, explained that he has seen the “exact opposite fruit” in the lives of several gays who, upon hearing what Scripture says about sexuality, have repented and found transformation through Christ.

At least one such transformed person found their way to the YouTube video to share her thoughts.

“I was gay when I was younger, and knew I had been born that way, and went to bible studies with ‘gay Christians.’ As we would get to Scripture about homosexual sin, the teacher would always say that it doesn’t apply to loving gays. I would ask questions about the other sins like adultery? Of course it

only applies to gays. I came to the realization, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that you cannot be gay and Christian. I am now married, and happy that I have been delivered from that lifestyle sin," wrote YouTube user Lisa Spears.

Interestingly, Vines didn't have a problem with people "converting" from homosexual practice. Instead, his response brought the issue back to an unstable view of Scripture.

"I'm actually perfectly fine with the idea of sexual fluidity," Vines explained. "My point is that there are many people for whom that does not happen... There are some people for whom lifelong celibacy is the necessary consequence of the total rejection of same-sex relationships."

Vines' celibacy argument implied a grave injustice in lifelong sexual restraint. But Brown reminded Vines that at the core of following Christ is self-denial. If Christians are to be willing to die for the sake of the gospel, giving up their wealth, homes and personal comfort to walk the Calvary road, why is celibacy an inconceivable evil?

And contrary to Vines, Brown posited that the Bible *does* have a solution for those who cannot reasonably commit to a life of celibacy: marriage.

"Paul says, yes, not everyone can be celibate; therefore, let every man have a wife and every woman have a husband. That's his solution, which, remarkably, Matthew doesn't quote in his book because it undermines his whole position," Brown asserted in reference to 1 Corinthians 7.

"God understands desires. How do you define sexual orientation? Being romantically and sexually attracted to the same sex? The Bible fully understands having those desires. The Bible fully understands fallen human nature. And also there are people who have attractions—let's say a man who is only attracted to preteen girls—what does he do? Does he say,

'Well, I can't be celibate for life'? No, the fact is, we must give ourselves completely over to the Lord," said Brown.

The Biblical Issue: Did the Holy Spirit Know About 'Sexual Orientation'?

Vines position tried to find a middle ground on the typical "clobber passages" in the Bible about homosexuality: that those texts don't address gay monogamy.

"This entire conversation we're having about gay Christians and their committed relationships is not a conversation that the Christian tradition has been having before the mid-twentieth century. It's not a conversation that Scripture directly addresses. In that sense, I'm not arguing for the overturning of 2,000 years of church history. I'm simply acknowledging that we're in a new situation, faced with a new issue of gay Christians," claimed Vines.

Vines continued to argue that because no Christian writers of the past allegedly ever addressed the consequence of lifelong celibacy, believers are put in a "new interpretive environment" in which to analyze biblical sexuality.

But Brown pointed out that Vines' position strips the Bible—and the words of Jesus Himself—from any kind of trustworthiness at all.

"That's the whole fatal flaw of Matthew's argument. It's saying that God Himself did not understand the concept of sexual orientation, which is outrageous—and that He inspired the writers of Scripture to write things that would be terribly harmful to same-sex attracted people, because if sexual orientation is a true concept, it's existed through the ages. So God inspired people to write the opposite of that to hurt people for 3,000 years, until somehow in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, when our sexual morality is in massive decline all around us, we discover this new thing called sexual orientation."

The issue of biblical inspiration became so heavy that moderator Julie Roys, who along with Moody Bible Institute asserts the orthodox Christian view of homosexuality, was forced to jump in with her own question for Vines.

“How do we know that our modern concept of sexual orientation—which again, most evangelicals actually don’t affirm—the modern concept that this is a fixed, immutable trait, core to your identity, how do you know that that concept is true?” Roys pressed Vines. “It almost seems like you’re saying that the Scriptural writers didn’t get that, like they had a bad anthropology. Is that what you’re saying?”

Vines claimed to uphold that Scripture is trustworthy on matters of anthropology, but that Paul and the other biblical writers were speaking to different historical circumstances—not gay monogamy.

“He’s talking about people who become so inflamed with their lusts and passions, and go off—they were having sex with people of the opposite sex, now they’re even having sex with people of the same sex. It’s a sign of their excess, their wantonness. It’s not a question of whether Paul was negative or neutral towards same-sex relations; he was clearly very negative. But the entire framework for his discussion of same-sex relationships was fundamentally different from our own. And this is the key point, pointing out that Paul is not talking about sexual orientation, he’s not talking about gay Christians.”

“Can you cite me any first century texts that refer to long-term, committed same-sex relationships?” Vines challenged Brown.

Brown explained that Plato’s *Symposium* discussed such relationships some 400 years prior to the time of Christ, and therefore the concept was clearly not foreign to the minds of the New Testament writers. Vines, discounted that example

because the gay relationship in Plato's writing starts as pederastic (that is, beginning at childhood).

Vines later attacked the use of a commonly cited verse from Leviticus 18: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (v. 22, ESV). According to Vines, the command applied only to the Levitical priesthood and was never meant for Christians.

Vines, pressed to provide a rationale for why the Levitical law would disallow homosexuality if gay relationships were not ultimately sinful, bizarrely claimed that such regulations were "based on the rejection of inverted gender roles in a patriarchal culture"—meant to maintain patriarchy.

Brown, a Jewish believer in Jesus and scholar of Semitic languages, took a different approach to the Old Testament laws.

"Leviticus 18 is for all people at all times," Brown retorted. "If Matthew wants to throw out Leviticus 18, what that means that there are no laws against incest."

The Bottom Line: Me vs. God

Vines' underlying premise, according to Brown, was, "This is who I am, therefore, God, you somehow have to affirm me."

Instead, Brown proposed a God-centered view of sexuality.

"In Jesus, you have everything you need, whether you're gay, straight, bi, however you identify yourself... God knows who we are. He has given us a better way," said Brown.

"All things are possible with God. Are you saying God *cannot* change someone's sexual orientation?"

Who won? Watch the full debate below:

When Your Life is a Mess

This single parenting thing is so difficult. I get confused by all the different situations, personalities, struggles, and issues of my children. I can't seem to get my feet under me on any of them!

And then there's me.

I think I might actually be more confused by my issues, struggles, emotions, and stresses than I am by any of my children's.

I'm a mess.

Sometimes people are offended when I say that. They want to correct me and say I shouldn't say that.

That I shouldn't be that.

That I should get my act together.

That I should be past the 'll be a God-sized task!

That I should get out of the pit, but I'm not in a is just challenging right now.

That I should just put my big girl pants on , my big girl pants are on, believe me.

They don't fit are sometimes too tight, sometimes too loose, sometimes too itchy, sometimes too stiff, sometimes too soft, sometimes the tag rubs wrong, sometimes they are on backwards and sometimes they are inside-out. But they are on. Dang it.

I think I'd like to say OKAY TO BE A LITTLE BIT OF A MESS!!!

God didn't say that I'd be perfect didn't say that life would be all neat and didn't say that people would act properly and not be didn't say that everything would work out if I followed a certain set of rules or God said kinda the opposite...

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

I looked up trials, tribulation and trouble in the back of my Bible and they pretty much seem like a given. BUT God does not leave us in these troubles.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Psalm 46:1-3

And these trials have a purpose. A good purpose...

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

Perfect, complete, lacking pretty good. Perfect is a pretty daunting word, but in this verse it does not mean being sinless. It refers to our spiritual maturity.

"The testing of our faith drives believers to deeper communion and great trust in Christ – qualities that in turn produce a stable, godly, and righteous character." (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Bible Commentary)

That's totally who I want to be, godly, righteous, not wobbly, messy, and self-centered.

And then I read about who suffered mightily on this earth and

begged God to take away his thorn, shared openly about his , who had a passion for the Lord that I long for, shared how He wrestled with sin and circumstances that were by no means ideal.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that swells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. Romans 7:19-25

BUT THE NEXT VERSE IS AWESOME!!!

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

After Paul shares of his struggles with sin, he reminds us and himself, that because of Jesus we are not condemned! How beautiful!

When I share my struggles, like Paul I want to point me (and you) back to Jesus. Because let's face it, we all struggle with something. How much better if we could share our struggles and our victories in order to encourage and bless one another without receiving any condemnation!

It would be such a monumental thing if we as the Body of Christ could be open and share without condemnation. If we could choose to walk alongside one another through our struggles and the battles we fight in order to share the victories!

And there will be victories because the battle is the Lord's!

Although I'm okay with sharing it, I'd really like to not be a mess. I'd really like to get my act together.

But God is showing me that getting my act together isn't really what I think it is.

I tend to think if I could just get a full-night sleep that would help, maybe some exercise, a well-ordered house, some children that actually do what I ask/tell them to know, basically the perfect I wouldn't be a mess.

But life is messy. And people are messy. And relationships are messy. And circumstances are messy.

And God tells us we will have trouble in this He also says that we aren't to fear it.

He has never been nor will he ever be surprised or overwhelmed by trouble, trials or messiness.

He isn't done with me because I'm a mess. He loves me always, completely, relentlessly.

When God looks at me He doesn't see my mess (thankfully!), He sees Jesus' perfection.

And maybe something positive we could do is remind ourselves again of who we are in Christ. I've not done this before, but I'm going to share a bit from my book. This morning I prayed and asked God to show me what to write is so much I long to share. And He has laid it heavily on my heart to share:

"Next, I want you to really take a look at yourself, your amazing survivor self. Remind yourself of who you are or can be in Christ. When my oldest was a little boy, I taught his Sunday school class, and we memorized this verse: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1)

I always thought that was one of the best verses to memorize. That word lavished is such a wonderful description of how God pours His love on us. It isn't a small amount, just enough to get us through the day. It isn't a decent amount that comforts us when things go badly. He gives us limitless love. There is no end to His love for us.

The chapter goes on to say that we know this is love because "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (verse 16). My friend, God doesn't just say He loves you; He demonstrated that love when, on the cross, He rescued you from your sin: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8 ESV). How valuable you are in His sight!

God knows you and loves you. "Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. [So] fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7 ESV). To all of us who believe in His name, "he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). You are chosen, rescued, and forgiven because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

I long for all of us to understand what Jesus has done for us. We didn't do anything worthy of His good opinion. And yet Christ still died for us. He knew our tendencies, our temptations, and our sins, and He still loved us enough to die for us. He still loves us enough to die for us. And He didn't choose us just because we were all cute and adorable. He chose us when we were all dirty, smelly, and rebellious. He loves us even when we feel unlovable.

Allow Him to "quiet you with his love" (Zephaniah 3:17), to calm your anxious thought, and to assure you that regardless of how you're feeling or what you're going through at this moment, you are dearly loved.

("When Happily Ever After Shatters: Seeing God in the Midst of Divorce and Single Parenting, 112-113)

We might feel like messes, but when God looks at us He sees His precious child. We might be uncomfortable with our mess, our children's messes and the messes of others, but God isn't.

He is willing and able to walk us through the mess. He will stick with us. All that He asks is that we trust Him.

Trust Him with our hurting, exhausted selves. Trust Him with our children. Trust Him with our circumstances. Trust Him with our messiness.

I have known God to be faithful. Another quote (sorry):

"Practically speaking, God obviously wasn't doing my dishes for me or dealing with my sticky counters, but His presence gave me strength to face each task, whether tedious or terrifying.

There are particularly difficult times in our lives when we completely understand that God is our strength. We realize that it isn't about coping with a situation; it's about living in God's strength. It's a surprisingly exquisite and painful place to be." (p. 24)

Dearest, trust God to take care of you. You will be amazed at what wonderful stuff He can bring out of our messes!

Sue Birdseye is an author and single mom of five kids that range from 4-years-old to 17-years-old. Her book, When Happily Ever After Shatters (Tyndale House) is in bookstores.

Supreme Court Passes on

Sexual Orientation Change Therapy Ban

The Supreme Court passed on Liberty Counsel's petition regarding California's ban on change therapy in the case of *Pickup v. Brown*.

Two lower court judges and two separate appellate panels have issued conflicting opinions upholding and blocking the ban on change therapy. A three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued an injunction pending appeal, followed by a three-judge panel that upheld the law. That panel then agreed to continue the injunction blocking the law until the Supreme Court had a chance to weigh in on the case. Today's decision by the Supreme Court to pass on the case means the proceeding will go back to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which could lift the injunction and allow the law to go into effect.

The California law was the first to restrict licensed counselors from offering, and minor clients and their parents from receiving, any counsel to change unwanted same-sex attractions, behaviors or identity.

"I am deeply saddened for the families we represent and for the thousands of children that our professional clients counsel, many of whom developed these unwanted attractions because of abuse of a pedophile. The minors we represent do not want to act on same-sex attractions, nor do they want to engage in such behavior. They are greatly benefiting from this counseling. Their grades have gone up, their self-esteem has improved, and their relationships at home are much improved," said Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel.

"These children have been victimized twice—first by the likes of Jerry Sandusky, and second by legislators and judges who have essentially barged into their private therapy rooms and

told them that they must pursue their unwanted and dangerous same-sex sexual attractions and behavior,” said Staver.

Only one to two percent of cases that request a hearing before the High Court are accepted for review. When the Supreme Court declines to hear a case, it does not rule on the merits. Typically the Court looks to resolve conflicts in the Circuit Courts of Appeal and state Supreme Courts. *Pickup v. Brown* was the first change therapy case in the country. It is possible the High Court will wait to take up a later case. In July another federal court of appeals will hear argument on a virtually identical law passed in New Jersey, which case Liberty Counsel also represents.

“I can assure you the battle over change therapy is far from over. We will be back,” concluded Staver.

Sorry, Elton John, Jesus Would Not Support Gay Marriage

As Elton John continues preparing for his own gay wedding, he’s speaking loudly about Christ’s views in the cultural debate that is leading even some mainline Protestant denomination leaders to defy the Word of God: gay marriage.

The Grammy-winning artist told *Sky News*’ Dermot Murnaghan about his plans for a quiet wedding with his partner David Furnish, his feelings about Pope Francis (he thinks the pontiff is “wonderful”), and that he plans to talk with Russian President Vladimir Putin about gay rights in November.

As John sees it, gay clergy should be allowed to marry and celibacy for Catholic priests should be done away with. But the biggest bombshell comment was what Sir Elton, as many now know him, said about Jesus Christ's views on gay marriage.

"If Jesus Christ was alive today, I cannot see him, as the Christian person that He was and the great person that He was, saying this could not happen," John told *Sky News*. "He was all about love and compassion and forgiveness and trying to bring people together and that's what the church should be about."

John got it halfway right. Jesus is loving, compassionate and forgiving. But Jesus would not support gay marriage today, He didn't support it when He walked the earth and He's not going to change His mind no matter how many denominations reject His truth. He's the same today, yesterday and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Many gay rights advocates argue that Jesus did not say anything about gay marriage. Besides the fact that Scripture, which is breathed by God, forbids homosexuality and many other sins (see 1 Cor. 6:9), Jesus did make the design for marriage clear when he told the Pharisees:

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6). And that, Sir Elton, settles it.

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Meet the Manly Megachurch Behind This Controversial Message on Beer, Marijuana

Editor's note: On Friday, Charisma News reported on Flatirons Community Church's pastor, Jim Burgen, and a controversial stance he took in one sermon over medical marijuana and beer. You can see that video [here](#). Writer Steve Rees attended one of the church's events and witnessed the ministry firsthand.

Even after a Friday night out with guys drinking micro-brews and getting a new tattoo, Bob Anderson expects the wife and kids to be happy with his actions.

After all, Anderson's buddies at Flatirons Community Church limited themselves to two hand-crafted beers before 8:15 pm., and his latest tattoo expresses a commitment to home life.

"This tattoo is basically a contract to my family that I'm going to live the way of Jesus," said Anderson of the freshly inked thin red line on his left arm.

Twenty-five other men paid \$45 dollars for the same art – literally a thin red line – as part of a signed pledge to fix their eyes on Jesus, demonstrate love, honor and faithfulness to their wives, and lead their families at The Man Event, Flatirons' second mega-men's gathering since January 2012.

Kyle Vincent joined Anderson in inking his arm with a thin red line on Friday.

"I was a real bad person and a jerk," said Vincent, who came to Flatirons after his release from jail in 2009.

"This thin red line is to show that I've changed," the 25-year-old Arvada man said.

Change, commitment and building a community of men who, with God's grace, won't surrender personal responsibilities or care for those entrusted to them are goals of the Thin Red Line pledge and The Man Event, say Flatirons pastors.

"We're trying to be a church that targets men," said Mens Community Pastor Dan Foote. "We'll get the heart of the family by getting the hearts of men."

To get their hearts, Flatirons baited 1,000 men with athletics, cars, sporting goods, food and drink, and a challenge from Senior Pastor Jim Burgen.

"If you want to avoid (casualties) in war and conflict, according to Jesus, you need to link arms with some other men," Burgen said. "Be that brother who has his friend's back.

"The greatest need in my life is for someone – besides my wife – to do life with me. Somebody who I can trust with everything," Burgen said.

The pastor then urged the men, "Before you leave here tonight, just walk by, stop, and talk to somebody" about how you can be involved.

Four thousand men showed up for the first edition of The Man Event in January 2012 when wristbands were distributed to anybody willing to sign the six-point, Thin Red Line pledge, Foote said.

Of the 1,000 men who turned out for the second edition of The Man Event on Friday, only 25 successfully jockeyed for the opportunity to trade in their wristbands for permanent ink.

Competition for ink isn't the only one taking place at Flatirons.

Seats on board a helicopter are limited to four men – twice a month, each month – who will pray over Boulder County cities from the air as part of LIFT, a new ministry that begins in mid-June

LIFT coordinator and lay ministry leader Abe Salazar says it's an invitation to men to pray.

"It's an amazing way to open the door for men to fellowship (and pray)" he said.

Intercessor Jacob Lambrecht agrees. "I think something like this is amazing.

"Just today, while volunteering at the church, I was praying over people who would come to tonight's event," said Lambrecht who, prior to coming to Flatirons from California, had prepared to jump off a pier.

Praying over Boulder County from the sky excites Lambrecht, despite his fear of heights.

Helicopter ministry isn't the only unique one at Flatirons.

Theology on Tap is a Bible study at brew-pubs around the metro-Denver area. Its popularity among Flatirons men lead, of course, to an inspired new tee-shirt logo: "What Would Jesus Brew?"

Theology on Tap is, similarly, Flatirons' way of embracing those whose faith is expressed through body art.

And, for riflemen, another tee-shirt bears divine support for their sport: "What Would Jesus Shoot?"

Salazar, the lay leader who has ministered to inmates and homeless, isn't at all surprised that a magazine dubbed Flatirons "the church for misfit toys."