

Pepperoni, Cheese and the Gay Marriage Debate

I don't own a pizza restaurant, and pizza is not currently allowed in my low-carb diet. But the burning question I'm asking myself in light of recent events in the United States is: "If a gay couple came into my shop and asked me to deliver 12 pepperoni-and-mushroom pizzas to their wedding, would I fill their order?"

I don't have to think too hard to answer that. Of course I would serve the pizza.

You probably asked yourself this same question last week when our nation was in an uproar over Indiana's proposed Religious Freedom Restoration Act. (You might have also wondered, like I did, *Who would order pizza for a wedding?* But that's not my point.)

The furor boiled over in late March when an employee of Memories Pizza in Walkerton, Indiana, told a reporter she would not feel comfortable delivering pizzas to a gay wedding because it would violate her Christian faith. Crystal O'Connor, the daughter of the restaurant's owner, told a local TV station: "If a gay couple came in and wanted us to provide pizzas for their wedding, we would have to say no."

Her comments triggered such a firestorm that the restaurant had to shut down temporarily because of angry calls and threats. (One person suggested that protesters burn down the place.) Later, when sympathizers learned of the backlash, they raised more than \$800,000 for the restaurant in a few days to show their support for the O'Connors. And a gay woman from Indiana apologized for the angry behavior of the gay community—and contributed \$20.

After businesses started announcing boycotts and travel bans

to punish Indiana, the fiasco got even uglier when pop star Miley Cyrus challenged her fans to “stir some [expletive] up” in Indiana to force lawmakers to revise the law—which, ironically, was meant to guarantee equality to gay people while also recognizing that religious people should not be forced to violate their consciences.

Only in America can you find this much drama over a hypothetical wedding that didn’t even happen.

Let’s be realistic. This month the Supreme Court will review the issue of gay marriage, and it’s possible that justices will make it legal in all 50 states. If that happens, the million dollar question will be whether our lawmakers will still defend the rights of religious people—specifically Christians—who believe in traditional marriage. If not, Christians could become a persecuted minority in a country that still prints “IN GOD WE TRUST” on our money.

America has always protected minority religious beliefs. Our laws don’t force the owner of a Jewish deli to serve pork, a Catholic couple to use birth control, or a Muslim woman to take off her veil. But today we need assurances from lawmakers that Christians will not be forced to violate their faith when gay couples are granted marriage rights. The Indiana law might have been a flawed attempt to secure religious freedom in our pluralistic society, but we need to address this issue now before someone suggests that having a Bible in my home is a criminal act because it is “anti-gay.”

I am a Pentecostal, Bible-believing Christian, and many people consider my religious views to be narrow. I still believe young people should wait until marriage for sex. I believe adultery is a sin. I have a strong personal conviction against abortion. But I also believe it is my duty to show kindness and compassion to those who don’t agree with me.

The same goes for my personal views on gay marriage. I believe

homosexuality is part of the sinful human condition. I am sorry if that offends some people, but that's what I believe God's Word says. I don't believe homosexuality is the "worst" sin, nor do I believe my faith requires me to be hateful toward a gay person. But to call a Christian a "bigot" because he views homosexuality as a sin is a form of bigotry in reverse.

Jesus was certainly no bigot. He was a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19), and He offered His love and salvation to prostitutes, corrupt politicians, social outcasts, drunkards and even religious hypocrites. But Jesus didn't wink at sin, redefine it or sidestep it. He showed us that if we really want to show love to a person, we should confront their sin, warn them about it and tell them the truth (see Matt. 18:15-17).

I am called to follow Christ. I will offer love, counsel, comfort, friendship, healing—and even pizza!—to anyone who needs my help, regardless of their race, creed, income level, religion or sexual preference. I believe any Christian-owned business should seek to model acceptance and a welcoming attitude toward others.

Yet as a Christian minister I cannot, in good conscience, perform a gay wedding because this would violate the vows I made to God when I surrendered to my calling. No Christian should have to forfeit their beliefs just because one minority group demands priority treatment. Religious freedom still matters. I hope you agree that a free society should defend everyone's right to practice their faith.

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