

Chick-fil-A CEO Regrets Making Chain a Symbol in Same-Sex Marriage Debate

The debate about same-sex marriage in our culture isn't likely to end soon, but the president and CEO of Chick-fil-A won't be chiming in again.

Dan Cathy, who made headlines nearly two years ago when he publicly supported traditional marriage, hasn't changed his mind. But he says Chick-fil-A has no place in the culture wars and that he regrets "making the company a symbol in the marriage debate," reports *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

"Every leader goes through different phases of maturity, growth and development and it helps by [recognizing] the mistakes that you make," Cathy says. "And you learn from those mistakes. If not, you're just a fool. I'm thankful that I lived through it and I learned a lot from it."

Cathy became CEO in November when his 92-year-old father, Chick-fil-A founder Truett Cathy, stepped down. The chicken chain is the only major fast-food chain that isn't open Sundays—due to the family's Christian convictions—and Dan Cathy says that is something he won't change.

In summer 2012, Cathy said he was "guilty as charged" in his religion-based opposition to gay marriage. His comments set off a firestorm; same-sex marriage proponents boycotted the restaurant while thousands showed their support by showing up in droves, setting records for sales.

The company did its best to remove itself from the controversy by repeatedly stating it does not discriminate against homosexual customers or employees.

“Probably the elements that were stressful for me most is from our internal staff and from operators and how this may be affecting them,” Cathy says. “The bottom line is we have a responsibility here to keep the whole of the organization in mind and it has to take precedence over the personal expression and opinion on social issues.”

But the CEO added fuel to the fire when he tweeted his disappointment last June over the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act and to decline to rule on Proposition 8.

“Sad day for our nation; founding fathers would be ashamed of our gen. to abandon wisdom of the ages re: cornerstone of strong societies,” he wrote in a post that was quickly removed.

After prayer and conversations with co-workers and friends, Cathy says he decided to step away from the gay marriage debate. He has made it clear, however, that his opinion hasn’t changed.

“I think the time of truths and principles are captured and codified in God’s Word, and I’m just personally committed to that,” he says. “I know others feel very different from that and I respect their opinion and I hope that they would be respectful of mine.”

Many Americans still consider dining at Chick-fil-A to be a political statement. Pasadena City College in California recently opposed a new location near campus because of concerns it contributes to “anti-gay” groups.

Cathy says the lingering identity is troubling.

“Consumers want to do business with brands that they can interface with, that they can relate with,” he explains. “And it’s probably very wise from our standpoint to make sure that we present our brand in a compelling way that the consumer can

relate to.”

Despite the controversy, Chick-fil-A remains one of the most successful chains in the fast-food industry, with 2012 sales of \$4.6 billion. The company is looking to expand beyond its base in the Bible Belt into Northeast and Midwest cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago in order to maintain growth.