

Compartmentalizing Faith: The Personal Reality of a New Brand of Religious Freedom

The First Amendment was a promise that we are free to live holistically, according to the dictates of our conscience. Last month, however, the First Amendment was subjected to assaults seeking to force the fully free exercise of faith into only the most private of places: our homes and houses of worship.

The intent is simple and fatal: redefine the meaning of religious freedom, making it a secondary right when exercised in the public square or marketplace.

If religious freedom becomes a secondary right, how will it affect you and your family? What challenges would you face if pressured to choose between your religious convictions and your job, business, or livelihood?

Imagine you run a bakery. You love your customers, have never denied services to anyone, and have employed openly gay individuals.

One day, a regular customer and her partner order a cake for their wedding ceremony. You are very fond of this customer, but believe that marriage was created by God as the union of one man and one woman. Affirming the marriage by baking a cake would violate your belief. You thank your customer for her business and politely explain that you cannot provide a cake. The next week, you receive a letter saying you have been sued under your state's anti-discrimination laws and face litigation and fines if you continue to refuse to bake the cake. A lawsuit could cripple the business you have spent years to build. What do you do?

What if your daughter's life-long dream is to be a counselor? She calls crying and says she has been expelled from her program. You are confused—she is an honor student at the top of her class. She received her assignment for a required course, and the client was seeking counseling about homosexual behavior. Her religious convictions prevented her from affirming a homosexual relationship, so to best serve the client, she asked her supervisor to assign the client to another counselor. Her supervisor said she must submit to a remediation program to “see the error of her ways” and change her beliefs, or withdraw from the program. What do you say to your daughter?

Maybe your family owns a successful business. You started with one store, but now have hundreds of stores across several states. A family of deep faith, your religious beliefs are inseparable from the way you live your lives—including your business decisions. You close your stores on Sundays to honor a day of rest and give your employees time with their families. Though similar stores often pay minimum wage, your full-time employees receive a starting salary of almost double the minimum. Full-time employees are also eligible for excellent health insurance plans.

Under the new healthcare law you will be forced to pay significant fines if your insurance coverage does not include contraceptive and abortive services. Such services violate your religious belief that all life is precious and have never been covered under your company insurance plan. You request an exemption, but are told your religious beliefs are irrelevant because you are making a profit. You will be fined less money if you offer no insurance, but ceasing coverage would harm your employees. What do you do?

These scenarios are based on real cases happening across the country; a country where people originally came to escape religious persecution. They demonstrate a trend towards a dangerous redefinition of “freedom of religion” into simply

“freedom of worship.”

The forced compartmentalization of faith fundamentally conflicts with the protection of religious freedom. Our First Amendment freedoms are deemed subordinate, when in fact our Founding Fathers revered religious freedom by giving the highest form of protection under law. Jefferson emphasized the value of freedom of conscience when he stated, “no provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority.”

Freedom of religion is more than freedom of worship—it is the freedom to live every aspect of our lives according to our faith. When individuals are faced with choosing between exercising their faith or defending a lawsuit or paying a fine, they are being deprived of a guaranteed constitutional right.