

The Surprising Ways Christians Are Responding to the Gay Marriage Ruling

Evangelicals may be the lone holdout against same-sex unions, according to a new Barna research study.

In an issue that's polarizing the Christian community, Barna discovered that a whopping 94 percent of evangelicals oppose the Supreme Court's decision to overturn a ban on issuing same-sex marriage licenses.

The statistic is nearly double the general population's opinion and just less than 30 percent more than how non-evangelical Christians feel toward the unions. When it comes to general Americans, people are split virtually down the middle regarding the ruling.

"The 20 million or so Americans who qualify under Barna's theological rubric are not just sort of different from other groups—they are dramatically different in their ideological and theological resistance," Barna President David Kinnaman says. "Still, it's interesting that many Christians, including evangelicals, are coming to the conclusion that it's possible to support legal same-sex marriage and also affirm the church's traditional definition of marriage. Many Christians are attempting to negotiate the new normal on this."

When the Supreme Court announced its decision, 100 evangelicals—a variable who's who in the community including Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, David Platt and imprisoned Saeed Abedini's wife, Naghmeh—pledged civil disobedience.

Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee and the Southern Baptist Convention vowed the same thing. However, their responses puzzle nonbelievers, the study found.

Of evangelicals, only 3 in 10 believed legalized gay marriage was inevitable, while 6 in 10 of the general populace believed it was a foregone conclusion.

Most people see a difference between legal unions and those blessed by the church, but don't understand why Christians cannot. The majority of Americans, including non-Christians, agree that pastors or ministers should not have to perform unions that violate their own religious beliefs, but are divided as to if for-profit religious businesses should be able to refuse services for gay nuptials.

To protect themselves, Bishop Joseph Mattera gave several steps for churches to take: "Have something in the church bylaws that state that your church will not perform same-sex weddings for members and non-members but will conduct wedding ceremonies for one man and one woman as biologically designed by birth (to protect against having to perform "transgender weddings" between those identifying themselves as a man and a woman)."

Regarding for-profit businesses, such as caterers or bakers, judges have largely sided with the plaintiffs and against the Christian foundations of the businesses. Take, for example, Arlene's Flowers, SweetCakes by Melissa and Ashers Baking Company, among others.

Are attacks on businesses, however, actually an attack on religious freedom? Yes, according to one UCLA law professor.

"This is the next front in gay rights," Adam Winkler tells *Religion News Service*. "These laws, by making this issue front and center, will encourage more efforts to pass a federal anti-discrimination law."

Other statistics in the Barna study reveal that while some compare the battle for gay rights to the civil rights movement, 55 percent believe the two do not equate. And while millennials are often a misaligned generation, this study

shows younger practicing Christians are likely to believe like older practicing Christians.

The study concludes that older generations and faith groups are worried for religious freedom, a buzzword this year after Indiana Gov. Mike Pence tried to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.