

**FIGHTING FOR OUR FIRST FREEDOM**  
**By Andy Manning**

**RECAP**

The title of this sermon is “Fighting for our First Freedom.”

We’re in sermon series called “Send it Ahead.”

It’s based on a single principle: **You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.** When it comes to your money, you can’t take it with you to heaven; but if you give it away to the poor, you can store up treasures in heaven that will benefit you from all eternity.

This principle comes from Jesus’ words in **Luke 12:33 (CSB).** “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Make money-bags for yourselves that won’t grow old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”

Jesus said that you can actually increase the size of your reward and the level of your joy in heaven by giving to the poor.

And so that’s what we’re doing in this year’s Christmas Offering. We’re giving over and above our regular tithe to a special Christmas Offering in order to send it ahead – to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

**3 KINDS OF POOR**

And we’ve identified three kinds of poor that you can give to. First, there are the spiritually poor. Second, there are the financially poor. Third, there are the legally poor; this is who we’re going to focus on today.

The legally poor are those who do not have equal rights and protection under the law.

There was a time when that included black people, but thanks to the Abolitionist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, both of which were led by Christians, black people now have equal rights and protection under the law. Does racism still exist? It always will. But in America racism is not a major problem because racist is no longer preventing black people from pursuing their dreams.

However, there are other groups today that still don't have equal rights and protection in America. One are unborn children, who do not have the right to life in America. We will focus on them next week. But today I want to focus on another group that does not have equal rights in America – Christians.

## **PERSECUTION IN THE US**

For the past several years several cities and states have passed laws known as SOGIs. SOGI stands for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. SOGIs are laws that are intended to promote equality for people who identify as gay, lesbian, or transgender, by making it illegal to discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

On the surface this sounds like a good thing. Discrimination is bad. But what the authors of these SOGI laws did not consider is that there are millions of Americans who have deeply held religious and moral beliefs about sex, marriage, and gender, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

So what happens when there is a clash between equality and religious liberty?  
What happens when there is a clash between sexual freedom and religious freedom?

What has happened over the past several years is that in the name of tolerance and equality, Christians all over America are being persecuted for their faith.

Because of their beliefs about marriage, sexuality, and gender, Christians are being fired from their jobs; they are being sued; they are being thrown in jail; and they are having to shut down their businesses.

How about a few examples?

**Kelvin Cochran** was the fire chief for the city of Atlanta in 2008, and was appointed by President Obama as the U.S. Fire Administrator for the United States Fire Administration, the highest office in his profession. When the city council discovered that he had written a book expressing his religious views against homosexuality and same sex marriage, he was fired.

**David and Jason Benham** were about to start a new HGTV home improvement television show called “Flip it Forward” when homosexual activists discovered that they were Christians against homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and so they made a big deal out of it. And sure enough, HGTV canceled the show.

**Craig James** was a sports broadcaster for Fox Sports Southwest. When a video tape surfaced showing him expressing his Christian beliefs in opposition to same-sex marriage, he was fired. Apparently Christians aren’t welcome at Fox Sports Southwest.

**Brendan Eich** was the CEO and co-founder of Mozilla, the company best known for the internet browser Firefox. He also invented the programming language called Javascript. When it was discovered that he was against same-sex marriage, he was attacked by homosexual activists and eventually lost his position. Apparently if you don’t support same-sex marriage you’re not fit to work in the state of California.

Then there’s the story of **Elane’s Photography**, owned by Elaine Huguenin of New Mexico. When she refused to take pictures for a same-sex wedding, the courts said they could not refuse, and they were ordered to pay the lesbian couple over \$6,000 in attorney’s fees.

**Baronelle Stutzman** is the owner of Arlene’s Flowers in Washington State. When she refused to make the flower arrangements for a same-sex wedding ceremony, the state sued her for everything she owned, both professionally and personally.

So what has happened is that the fight for tolerance of gays has become a movement of intolerance and persecution of anyone who does not want to join the homosexual revolution.

## **JACK PHILLIPS**

Over the past several years so many lawsuits over this issue have piled up on the steps of the Supreme Court, that they have finally decided to take on the issue.

The particular case is called Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission.

The man at the center of this case is Jack Phillips, the owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop.

Let me tell you about Jack.

From an early age Jack loved art, and after high school he found a way to make money with his art through cake design.

And so in 1993 he opened his bakery and called it Masterpiece Cakeshop.

He chose that name for two reasons.

First, as a strong Christian, he wanted every cake and everything in the business to honor his master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's actually named after his favorite Bible verse, **Ephesians 2:10 (CSB)**. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago."

Let me quote **Jack**. He said, "The 'Master' part of Masterpiece reminds me what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that 'no man can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24). We don't want God to

be part of our lives on just Sundays. We want Him to be part of our lives every day.”

Second, he called it Masterpiece Cakeshop because his business is not simply a bakery, but an art gallery. Every cake is truly a work of art.

In fact, the logo of his business is an artist’s palette with both a paintbrush and an egg beater whisk.

When he opened his business, the local newspaper wrote an article about it and said that right when you walk into his shop, you see an art gallery of cakes.

Because Jack is a Christian, he made a decision from the very beginning not to design any cake that would dishonor Christ.

He does not design Halloween cakes, cakes that would disparage other people, racist cakes, atheist cakes, anti-American cakes, cakes celebrating divorce, crude cakes for bachelor parties, and he doesn’t design same-sex wedding cakes.

Keep in mind that Jack Phillips serves everyone. He serves blacks, whites, Hispanics, gays, lesbians, transgenders, republicans, and democrats.

He serves everyone, but he cannot promote all messages, or participate in all events.

In 2012 Jack was approached by a same-sex couple to design a cake for their wedding reception.

He said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t do a cake for a same-sex wedding. I can pretty much sell you anything in the store, but not that.”

They cussed him out, flipped him off, left, and then 20 minutes later his phone started ringing constantly for weeks with people saying horrible, vile things to him.

He received death threats.

They initiated a boycott and protest against him.

Eventually the state's Civil Right's Commission ordered Jack to design cakes for same-sex couples regardless of his Christian beliefs, to re-educate his staff, and to file quarterly compliance reports for two years.

So Jack had no choice but to stop making all wedding cakes, but this cost him dearly. He lost 40% of his business, and had to lay off 6 of his 10 employees, two of whom were family members.

So with the help of the Alliance Defending Freedom, Jack has continued to fight the decision, and now his case has made it all the way to the Supreme Court.

And the Supreme Court is going to hear Oral Arguments on Tuesday, December 5.

## **WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?**

So here's what we're going to do as a church.

First, as part of our Christmas Offering, we're raising \$1,000 to donate to his law firm, Alliance Defending Freedom, to support Jack in this fight.

And second, we're going to fast and pray tomorrow, Monday, in preparation for the hearing on Tuesday.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE**

Now some of you may be undecided on this issue, so I want to take a little time to explain what's at stake.

These are the very words of **Kristen Waggoner**, Jack's attorney at Alliance Defending Freedom:

Will creative professionals will continue to have the right to create artistic expression that is consistent with their convictions; or will they be forced to create expression that violates those convictions and to celebrate religious ceremonies that violate their religious faith?

This is not about same-sex marriage or homosexuality or transgenderism.

Our church believes that those things are sinful; you might not. But that's not the issue.

This is about everyone's freedom to live out their religious beliefs, not just at home and at church, but in the marketplace.

Should a **gay-friendly baker** be forced to design a cake that condemned homosexuality? What if a Christian walked in and asked for a cake that had Leviticus 18:22, and the words, "Homosexuality is a sin"? Should a gay-friendly baker be forced to design that cake? Of course not.

Should a **Muslim baker** be forced to design a cake that criticized their religion and said, "Muhammed is a false prophet"? No way!

Should a **Jewish photographer** be forced to take pornographic and vulgar images? No.

Should a **black property owner** be forced to allow the KKK to rent his facilities for a KKK rally?

If you owned a **T-shirt or a Bumper Sticker company**, shouldn't you be able to refuse to produce certain images and certain messages that are highly offensive to you? Yes.

If you are a **Christian doctor or nurse**, should you be forced to perform abortions or sex change operations if those go against your deeply held beliefs? No!

The point is that people should be free to exercise their religious and moral convictions at work.

And if Jack is not allowed to exercise his religion at work, then you won't be free to exercise yours.

## **PICKLE**

There's an interesting story that illustrates this.

Pickle is a 9-year-old boy from California. His real name is Dylan Harbin, but people call him Pickle.

One day he sent a letter to Donald Trump in which he called Trump his favorite president and asked if they could be friends. He even asked his parents for a Donald Trump themed birthday party, with a Donald Trump suit, complete with a cake that said "Make America Great Again."

The interesting thing is that his mother had to make the cake herself because she couldn't find a bakery willing to do it.

Should those California bakers be forced by the government to make a Donald Trump cake? No. They have freedom of speech. They have freedom of religion. They have the right to decline to use their artistic talents to celebrate events or promote messages that violate their beliefs, even if it offends and sweet little boy.

So here's the question: Do all bakers have freedom of speech and religion, freedom of conscience, or only those who dislike Trump?

## **DOUBLE STANDARD**

Here's another interesting fact.

After the Colorado Civil Rights Commission told Jack that he had to make same-sex wedding cakes, another Christian took action.

He went into three different gay-friendly bakeries in Colorado and requested cakes that had religious messages opposing homosexuality and same-sex marriage, but the bakers refused.

So the Christian complained to the Civil Rights Commission, and the Commission, including the very same commissioner who ruled against Jack Phillips, decided that these three bakers did not need to design cakes that violated their convictions.

If that's not a double standard, I don't know what is.

I once heard it said that if the left didn't have double standards it wouldn't have any standards left.

## **VIDEO**

I want to show you a quick video from Alliance Defending Freedom that illustrates this exact point. ADF interviewed students on the campus of the University of Wisconsin Madison. They asked students four questions: **First question:** “There was a dress designer who turned down Melania Trump. Does she have the right to do that?” The students answered Yes. The interviewer even clarified by asking, “So you have the right to opt out of business that you might not want to associate with?” Yes. **Second question:** If a church asked a Muslim singer to sing at the church’s Easter service, does the Muslim have the right to decline? The students answered Yes. One student answered, “That seems like such an unusual circumstance that the Christian church would want to force a Muslim to sing at their church if they didn’t want to.” Another student said, “Yeah, if that goes against your religious views I feel like you have the right to turn that down.” **Third question:** “If there was a city ordinance that would allow those groups to

sue you for opting out and turning down their request, do you think that's a good law? Do you think a law should exist that would force someone to do the work?" The students all answered No. **Fourth question:** "So let's say you're a Christian photographer and a gay couple asks you to take the photos for their wedding, do you have the right to refuse?" The students answered No. So everyone agreed that a creative professional should have the freedom to decline work that conflicts with their conscience and beliefs; but when asked specifically if a Christian should be able to decline a gay wedding because it conflicts with their conscience and beliefs, people said No. The video ended with this question: "If a law that forces someone to promote something that's against their beliefs is so laughable and unimaginable, then why is it so difficult to extend that same freedom to a Christian professional?"

You see, as Christians we are in support of religious freedom for everyone.

And if your personal religious beliefs prevent you from designing a cake that condemns same-sex marriage, that's fine. I support your right to do that.

But Christians deserve those same rights and freedoms.

### **WHAT ABOUT DISCRIMINATION?**

But you might be thinking, "Isn't it unlawful to discriminate? You can't refuse to serve someone on the basis of their race; why is it okay to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity?"

Let me respond to that with four thoughts.

**First of all, race is not the same as sexual orientation or gender identity.**

Race is innate. You can't change it or stop it.

Homosexuality and transgenderism are lifestyle choices.

Am I saying that they choose to have those feelings? No. But they choose whether or not to act on them.

Thousands of former homosexuals and transgenders have come out of that lifestyle and are living in obedience to Jesus Christ.

Race is different. Being black is not a lifestyle choice. It's a skin color.

You can't choose to not be black. But you can choose to not live a homosexual lifestyle; you can choose to live in accordance with your biological sex rather than your perceived gender.

**Second, the United States Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of race.** But it does not say anything sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Third, this is not a case of discrimination because Jack Phillips does not refuse to serve gays.**

He sells cakes to gays all the time.

He just can't design cakes that violate his religion, and that includes cakes that celebrate same-sex marriage.

**Finally, before you start feeling sorry for the same-sex couple, ask yourself this question: Who is the real victim here?**

The same-sex couple that Jack declined to serve was offended. Welcome to adulthood. I am offended every time I turn on the TV, which makes fun of my faith and my beliefs on just about every show and every channel.

But Jack, on the other hand, was cussed out, flipped off, received hateful phone calls non stop for several weeks, received death threats, faced a boycott and a protest against him, and was forced to either violate his religion and disobey God, or stop making wedding cakes altogether. And

that's what he had to do. And he lost 40% of his business and had to lay off 6 of his ten employees, including two family members.

So who's the real victim in this story?

## **THE ROE V. WADE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

Many people are calling this case the Roe v. Wade of religious liberty.

As you know, Roe v. Wade is the infamous Supreme Court case in 1973 that legalized abortion in all fifty states during all nine months of pregnancy for any reason whatsoever. Since that time, more than 60 million babies have been killed.

So to call this current case the Roe v. Wade of religious liberty should get your attention. This is big. Really big.

The recent clash between sexual liberty and religious liberty is the biggest threat to religious liberty in our nation's history. And that's why we're getting involved.

## **ACTS**

In the book of Acts, as the New Testament church was just getting started, the Jewish authorities arrested Jesus' disciples and ordered them to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus.

They tried to use the force of government to restrict the disciples' speech and religion – fundamental, inalienable human rights; rights that are essential to a free, and flourishing society.

But this is what the disciples said in **Acts 5:29 (CSB)**. “We must obey God rather than people.”

That's essentially what Jack Phillips said; and that's why we're standing with him.

As Christians we don't have the luxury of just abandoning our beliefs whenever people in power tell us that those beliefs are no longer in style. We can't just abandon our beliefs.

And so the government has two options.

It can grant us religious liberty; it can give us space to exercise our religion as long as we are not inflicting physical harm on others.

Or it can outlaw our beliefs and turn honorable patriots into outcasts and criminals.

## **GET INVOLVED**

So here's what I'm challenging you to do.

**First, get involved in the fight for religious liberty.**

Religious liberty is under attack like never before in our nation's history.  
Now's the time to get in the fight.

Vote for politicians who are strong on religious liberty.

Vote against SOGIs. Right now Louisiana does not have a SOGI, and neither does Lafayette or the Federal Government. But the fight is coming to a city near you. Be prepared to vote for religious liberty.

Study up on the issue and learn how to make the case on social media and with your friends.

**Second, donate to the Christmas Offering so that we can send our financial support to Jack Phillips and Alliance Defending Freedom.**

I want you to know how serious our church is about this issue.

Back when the Supreme Court first Announced that it would hear Jack's case, I brought the issue to the Lead Team, and they decided right away to cut a check for \$1,000 to Alliance Defending Freedom.

And so now we're trying to raise another \$1,000.

### **Third, fast and pray with us.**

Tomorrow, December 4, we're fasting and praying for success in the Supreme Court.

Remember, the Oral Arguments are Tuesday. That means that Kristen Waggoner, Jack's attorney, and the opposing attorney, will both stand before the nine justices of the Supreme Court and make their case. We're praying for success.

The case won't be decided until June, but Tuesday's a big day.

So here's what I'm doing. Starting when I wake up on Monday morning, I'm not eating any food all day until Tuesday morning.

And I'm going to have three times of prayer. The best way to fast is to spend time in prayer when you would normally be eating. So I'm going spend time in prayer during breakfast, lunch, and supper.

If you would be willing to fast with us, then check it off on your Connection Card. I'd like to know who and how many of us are standing together in prayer for Jack.

### **WHAT ARE WE PRAYING FOR SPECIFICALLY?**

- We're praying for the Supreme Court to decide to protect the right of creative professionals to create artistic expression that is consistent with their convictions.

- We're praying for the Supreme Court to decide to protect the freedom of conscience, not only for those who support same-sex marriage, but for all Americans, and not only in private and at church, but at work.