**Religious liberty in the public square**

Recently there have been an increased number of situations that have led to confusion regarding how religious convictions should be followed in the public square. A few examples include: a high school football coach was fired when he publicly prayed after football games; a Clerk of Court in Kentucky was jailed when she refused to sign marriage certificates for homosexual couples; Jews in California were prohibited from engaging in a ritual in which chickens were killed and donated to needy families; florists, photographers and bakers have been threatened with the loss of their businesses, homes and other finances for refusing to offer their services in support of activities which go against their religious beliefs.

This paper does not seek to support or dispute any religious convictions, it is simply meant to address two different viewpoints regarding an individual’s right in the US to express those convictions in the public square.

**Religious convictions have no place in the public square**

If you choose to work for government or have a business/non-profit organization that serves the public, it is your responsibility to limit the public expression of your religious beliefs to only those beliefs which do not expressly offend the public you serve. When you decide to engage in the public square in this way, the expressions and activities of your efforts as a licensed business, elected official or public servant should conform to legal requests/needs of those you serve.

While you maintain your right to freedom of speech, you do not have a right to express your opinion or belief in a manner that conflicts with another person’s opinion or belief if you choose to have a government issued license as a professional, a business or a public servant. If your job is to make cakes, you must make them for any customer and for any reason that is legal. If your job is to issue marriage certificates, you must issue them to anyone who meets the legal requirements. If your job is to offer counseling, you must counsel in a way that does not conflict with the legal requirements.

**Following religious convictions in the public sphere**

As laws are enacted in our society, which go against people’s religious beliefs, many Christians are forced to consider whether or not they will offer their work for hire to support these secular positions.

For many years a provision called “conscientious objector” was used to give protection to those who were serving in capacities where they believed what they were being asked to do would go against their faith. Two obvious examples are: a soldier who serves as a medic or a journalist because he/she believes that “killing” is against the Word of God, or a doctor who is not required to perform abortions because he/she believes that a fetus in the womb is a child. It is the opinion of those who support expressing religious convictions in the public square that this conscientious objector provision should be more widely recognized and utilized.

For those who believe that their businesses are used to honor God and therefore refuse to use their gifts in support of activities, which they believe go against the Word of God, the following verses are often referenced:

* Jeremiah 22:13 – Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness….
* Deuteronomy 8:18 – But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.
* Joshua 24:15 - …. Choose you this day whom you will serve….
* Matthew 6:24 - …You cannot serve both God and money.
* Galatians 1:10 - Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

For people who believe their talents and gifts are from God, many feel that to use them for something that they believe would dishonor God would be worshipping money over God or would be seeking the approval of man over God. They believe that being good stewards means that they create, employee, serve and grow – but they don’t make things or do things that dishonor God.