

Not Talking with My Mouth Full

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – August 12, 2012

I wasn't at Chick-fil-A on Wednesday, August 1. For the record, I haven't eaten there in at least sixty days. That's not a political statement or a reflection of my food preferences; it's a necessity while trying (with some success) to get my clothes to fit again.

Chances are, though, if I was allowing myself to occasionally indulge in a fried chicken sandwich or biscuit, I'd still have stayed away last Wednesday. Complex social issues are difficult enough to discuss with unlimited time and all the words in the English dictionary. So, making commentary with a chicken sandwich in my mouth isn't a good option for me. I'll use my ~750 words here instead.

I personally believe same-sex couples deserve the same rights as heterosexual couples. I also respect and defend Dan Cathy's first amendment right to speak freely in opposition to my view.

I have long admired the Chick-fil-A Corporation. As a privately held company, they hold to guiding principles in a way most publicly traded companies who must bend to the profit-first mindset of shareholders cannot. When they close on Sundays, they forego revenue and profits. I have always respected their leadership for resisting the lure of increased sales to honor a principle they hold more highly. That's all fine and good with me.

I also don't take issue with Mr. Cathy's original "guilty as charged" comments regarding belief in the "biblical definition of the family unit." (It's difficult to understand how a company has a singular "belief." But, I've been told "corporations are people." And, at the end of the day, I guess it's just complicated. But, Mr. Cathy and his family own the company; they can express its beliefs as they see fit.)

However, his later words about "inviting God's judgment" and "prideful, arrogant nature" are more troubling – though I still support his right to speak them.

The gay and lesbian couples I know are no different from other loving couples I'm fortunate to have in my life. They're not "prideful" or "arrogant," and they definitely don't ask to be judged by anyone. They do their human best to be truthful to the people their creator made them to be, asking only to be accepted for who they are. I suspect most are at peace with whatever judgment may come to pass between them and their maker. And, who else's business is it anyway?

When Chick-fil-A closes on Sunday, they exercise a right to religious expression, and they alone bear the consequences. I admire that. When they use their voice and their financial resources

to campaign against gay rights, they also exercise their freedom of speech. But, those actions infringe upon what I believe to be the legitimate rights of others.

When my pants fit comfortably again, I won't let a difference of opinion keep me from doing business with Chick-fil-A. Mr. Cathy's views are not necessarily those of every employee, and we still have to get along. In that vein, the Mayors in Boston and Chicago are not helping, and they have no legal grounds to try and block the company's expansion in their cities.

Some activists on both sides of this issue have been out of line. I won't apologize for or condone rude or hateful behavior towards anyone. Bullies are bullies, no matter what view they promote.

Before we get too carried away, though, I caution religious conservatives not to paint supporters of same-sex marriage and gay rights as "the far left" or the "liberal extreme." Since 2009, public opinion polls have consistently shown a majority of Americans favor allowing same-sex couples to marry. In 2012, polls by CNN, NBC News, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Gallup, Pew Research, and ABC News have consistently shown between 50% and 54% of those responding support legalizing same-sex marriage. This is not a far left agenda. Mainstream America is speaking.

Just because a majority believes something doesn't mean you have to change your personal beliefs one iota. But, it does mean we can't accurately label those views extreme. The center isn't defined by where you or I stand on an issue; it's defined by where the majority stands. We can't demand our leaders "honor the will of the people" on one issue (say taxes), while simultaneously ignoring the will of the people on this one.

The people say it's time to give same-sex couples the respect and rights they deserve, just like every other American. Maybe we can discuss this further over a Chick-fil-A. I'll buy.