

Ugh, Christian wedding mills

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Did you hear about the for-profit wedding chapel owners in Idaho who are [claiming a constitutional right](#) (pdf) to refuse services to same-sex couples? From [Marci Glass's entertaining post](#):

I hate to be the one to point this out to the Reverends Knapp, but they are not, in fact, pastors of a church. **They own a wedding mill.**

The government has not compelled, nor will it compel, ministers to officiate at any weddings. Clergy have great discretion about the marriages we participate in. I didn't [sign licenses](#) for 3 years because of marriage *inequality* in Idaho. The government never once compelled me to sign a license.

I fully support the Knapps in their decision not to personally officiate at weddings that violate the sanctity of marriage. *And clearly, by marrying only 35,000 couples, they have maintained a high scrutiny in their standards.*

As business owners, however, they need to make accommodations equally for the couples who believe the faux Western façade of the Hitching Post is the venue where they want to celebrate their life long commitment.

[Zack Ford has more](#) on the Knapps' recent attempts to redefine their business—which [as of just weeks ago](#) explicitly welcomed couples from all faiths and none—as a specifically Christian organization, the better to assert religious rights. (Legally, this sort of thing is very much [an up-in-the-air question](#).)

I have little sympathy for the Knapps. I'm pretty sure *wedding mills* do far more to undermine the strength of Christian marriage than gays and lesbians could ever do if they were trying to. Which, of course, they aren't. I'm with [Glass](#):

If you really cared about “Biblical Marriage”, you would want couples to celebrate their covenants in the presence of their faith communities, before God, and with some solemnity, and not across the street from the courthouse in a one stop shop wedding mill.

Right. "The Hitching Post," begins [the company's "about" page](#), "specializes in small, short, intimate, and private weddings for couples who desire a traditional Christian wedding ceremony." They desire it, that is, without the traditional size, length, community, or open door. Whatever work "traditional Christian" is trying to do in that sentence, it seems to have little to do with word or sacrament or public worship of any kind.

Not that most American weddings do these days. A place like the Hitching Post is less a weird outlier than an extreme symptom of our culture's weird take on marriage and weddings. Even in less colorfully offensive settings, the same status quo reigns:

- Your wedding is all about you and what you want.
- So is religion, actually. So if you want some "traditional Christianity" in your wedding, include some—your choice.
- Religious marriage and civil marriage aren't separate cultural realities, not *really*. They're a single thing, authorized by the state and—again, if you want—solemnized by the church.

I used to be more optimistic that this last point could be changed, that we could diffuse this front of the culture wars by promoting a truer separation. [But "marriage" is a powerful word](#), and understandably, neither the church nor the wider culture is eager to give it up.

The consequences of this conflation, however, are all too real. Gay and lesbian couples have to deal with religiously motivated opposition from people they might or might not have any religious connection to whatsoever. And churches—aside from whether they welcome LGBT people—have to wrestle with complex questions about how and how much to accommodate the culture's individualistic, largely contractual understanding of marriage and weddings generally. The first problem is, of course, rapidly changing. In opposing same-sex marriage, the Knapps are fighting a losing battle against a remarkable wave of cultural progress. As for the second one—muddiness about what exactly a Christian wedding *is*—[I'm not so sure](#).

But I don't just hope for an America in which a for-profit business selling "small, short, intimate, and private weddings for couples who desire a traditional Christian wedding ceremony" gets laughed out of court for claiming a religious right to discriminate against gays and lesbians. I also hope for a church in which Christians of all stripes laugh such a place out of business before "the gay question" even comes up.