

HOWARD SCHULTZ:

Starbucks' chief executive is adamant in his support of same-sex marriage.



Should Christians Sell Their Starbucks Stock?

NATIONAL BOYCOTT URGED OVER COFFEE GIANT'S SUPPORT OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

► **THE NEXT TIME YOU BUY A CUP** of coffee, will your money go to the movement to recognize same-sex marriage? Will it go to organizations that call you bigot if you support traditional marriage?

If that cup comes from Starbucks, some of it will.

That's why, as of early April, some 61,000 people who support

traditional marriage had joined a boycott of the Seattle-based coffee company.

"There are many companies that, unfortunately, have embraced a false idea about marriage," said Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), which launched the boycott last year after Starbucks

publicly supported legislation to allow same-sex marriage. "Starbucks, though, is one of the most egregious, because not only is it putting its money, resources and voice in support of redefining marriage, it has also bluntly said that if Christians disagree, they can take their money elsewhere."

Starbucks' support of homosexuality is well-publicized. In January 2012, the company issued a statement that said in part: "Starbucks is proud to join other leading Northwest employers in support of Washington State legislation recognizing marriage equality for same-sex couples." Other major companies that supported the legislation included Microsoft, Nike, Home Depot, Amazon and Google.

In addition, Starbucks was one of nearly 300 corporations to sign on to a friend-of-the-court brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act. The Court heard arguments in March and has said it will issue a ruling by June.

Starbucks has also been listed as a sponsor of the Fresno Reel Pride Film Festival, a lesbian and gay film festival in Fresno, Calif., and the company is a "bronze partner" of the Human Rights Campaign, an organization that characterizes opposition to same-sex marriage as "discrimination" and "bigotry."

At Starbucks' annual shareholders meeting March 20, shareholder Tom Strobhar pointed out that since NOM announced its boycott, Starbucks' stock price has underperformed both its own projections and the S&P 500, suggesting that the company's support of gay marriage is hurting its stock value.

Howard Schultz, chairman, president and CEO, responded: "If you feel, respectfully, that you

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—Starbucks Shareholder Tom Strobhar

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—Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage

can get a higher return than the 38 percent you got last year, it’s a free country. You can sell your shares of Starbucks and buy shares in another company. Thank you very much.”

In an interview with *Decision*, Strobhar reflected on the exchange. “I’ve been going to annual meetings for 20-some years and saying difficult things to corporate executives,” he said. “That’s the first time anyone has ever suggested I sell my shares.”

As for the 38 percent return that Schultz mentioned, Strobhar explained that most of that increase came in the final quarter of 2011, before Starbucks announced that supporting gay marriage aligns with its core values.

At the shareholders meeting, Strobhar also asked about comments Schultz has made about the need for civility. Strobhar told *Decision*: “I asked him about Starbucks’ continued support for the Human Rights Campaign, which calls me and other people who believe in traditional marriage haters and bigots. I said, ‘Is that very civil? And if not, why do you support them?’ That’s when he got really fired up and gave that kind of remark, because he was decidedly annoyed.”

Some Christian leaders have said they do not support the Starbucks boycott or the use of boycotts in general. Both Strobhar and Brown think otherwise.

“Unfortunately,” Brown said, “some Christians have accepted this flawed view that you can have your beliefs, and you can believe in the legitimacy of Scripture, but you don’t have any right to bring that into the public square. That is simply wrong. That is not the traditional Christian understanding of the call of the Gospel, which is to permeate not only our own lives, but our decision-making in business and politics and all realms of human life.”

To those who say boycotts aren’t effective, Brown responds: “Well then, you’re giving your money to a company that is going to use it to attack your views. People have choices in this country about where they spend their money. All we’re saying is, let’s make a smart choice about where we go. And I don’t think it’s at all a smart choice for Christians to be giving their money to a company like Starbucks.”

Strobhar points to the bottom line for corporations. During his exchange with Schultz at the shareholders meeting, Schultz said Starbucks’ stance on same-sex marriage was not an economic decision but was intended to embrace diversity.

Strobhar said later, “It’s clear to me he doesn’t believe in *religious* diversity. Admittedly, most people are not going to boycott something—I don’t care what the subject is. Maybe a few percent will not go to a particular company,

vendor, etc. But a few percent is not to be sneezed at. Net profits at most corporations are 5 percent. To dismiss 2–4 percent as ‘we don’t need them’ is absurd.”

Beyond the boycott itself, Brown pointed to the wider implications of legalizing same-sex marriage, pointing out that churches will be seen as discriminating and bigoted by standing up for biblical truth. Churches could lose their tax-exempt status, Brown said. “If you accept the false argument that it is discrimination and bigotry to believe in and act on the truth about marriage, then the state has powerful ways to repress a view that it sees as discriminating.”

Regardless of what comes, Brown and Strobhar believe Christians must not back down.

“There are some times when you need to disagree with the dominant culture,” Brown said. “There are Christians dying for their faith right now in Sudan and around the world. In this nation, we are not being asked to die at this point for the truth of Scripture. But we do face increased opposition from the dominant secular culture.

“If that’s all we have to go through, there shouldn’t be any second thoughts. It’s simply not acceptable for a Christian to say, ‘I’m not going to stand for the truth, because some people won’t like me.’ We need to do it in a winsome way, in a way that shows our love for all, but we need to do it. We need to stand.”  ©2013 BGEA

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