
In the Wake of a New Morality

As most of you are well aware, this church and this pastor are committed to the expository preaching of the Word of God. We are devoted to the verse by verse explanation and application of God's Word. And so, whether we find ourselves in the book of Ephesians or some other text, our main diet of the Word of God on Sunday mornings is expositional teaching.

There are times, however, when we need to, for just a moment, break from this tradition in order to address matters of importance to this congregation and to the Church of Jesus Christ at large. This morning is one of those moments. Whether we desire this to be so or not, we who are living in this moment are participants in a most profound and significant series of events, events that will radically change our engagement in what we know as American culture.

On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision that will reshape our country forever. This is not some bump in the road, something felt for just a moment and then forgotten. Rather, as believers in Jesus Christ and as those who hold to the authority and wisdom of the Word of God, the decisions (and I stress the word "decisions") made by the Supreme Court will change the way our society looks at marriage, morals, government, and even followers of Christ.

While I am not known to stand before you and specifically address political and constitutional issues; I find myself compelled to communicate with you what has taken place, what it means for us, as well as how we need to respond as believers to an ever darkening, God-rejecting culture. I stand on Biblical authority for sharing with you what I intend this morning. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, the apostle Paul gives this command to a pastor named Timothy, reminding him of the sacred responsibility believers have toward the state. Paul writes: ***1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*** We are to pray for those in authority, be it our president, our senators, our congressmen, or for nine Supreme Court justices. The purpose of praying for these and others in authority is that ***"we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."*** May we so pray and may the Lord so answer such prayers. But be it known that while this is to be our prayer, the result has not always been immediately experienced by Christians throughout the ages. I am not a prophet, but I do believe that our lives as believers have just become more complicated and that unless we are committed to live by the grace of God and under the authority of His Word, we will be marginalized, minimized and ultimately removed from all things public.

And so, this morning, I wish to educate both you and myself with what exactly has happened. As I said, this is not an "expository" message; rather it is a "Christian worldview" message. And to understand the Christian worldview, we need to understand how the world thinks about those issues that we hold dear.

For those of you who listen to Albert Mohler's "The Briefing" - then you have heard what I am about to communicate with you. This morning I intend to simply modified his special edition broadcast of June 26, 2015. I am using Mohler's address because he has so concisely and adeptly communicated what we need to know as Christians in this era of history we are embarking. And let me say one more thing before we begin; as Christians, the most significant things in our lives have not changed. God is still in control; the Word of God is still relevant, the presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is still our mission; and we are the only people who can offer hope to a culture that is going to need hope more than ever.

On Friday, June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States handed down its decision on the matter of the same sex marriage issue in the case of Obergefell v. Hodges. By a 5 to 4 decision, the United States Supreme Court effectively redefined marriage in all fifty states. By that 5-4 decision, the court found that there was a constitutional right for same sex couples to

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marry, a right to which all the fifty states are obligated, in terms of the legalization and full recognition of same sex unions as marriage.

As anticipated, the decision for the majority was written by Justice Anthony Kennedy, who was joined in the majority by Justices Ginsberg, Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan. This majority of five, that is five out of the nine justices, effectively and largely single-handedly, as one branch of government, redefined marriage for the entire nation. The decision in this case was expected by the end of the court's term early next week but was released seemingly early. Part of the reason why it may have been released early is because June 26 was the anniversary of the 2003 Lawrence decision on gay rights, also with the opinion written by Justice Kennedy and it was the second anniversary of the Windsor case, released June 26, 2013, with the majority opinion also written by Justice Kennedy.

Most informed observers looking at the case and listening to the oral arguments; looking at the trajectory on the court and in the larger culture, had expected the basic shape of the decision that was released. It was anticipated. Signals had been sent by the Justices both as they sat in the court and as they spoke outside the court's operations indicating that this result was likely. And yet, in the final analysis, the decision is far more damaging, far more devastating, far more significant than even we had expected. In one sense that's because this decision isn't only about marriage, that's not its only importance. It's hard to overestimate just what it means that the court has redefined marriage. But in the larger sense, as justice Scalia, joined by three other dissenters made very clear, what the court effectively did in this decision was to change the way the United States government operates and how we, as a nation of laws, come to have the laws under which we operate. That is a more ominous development even than just the redefinition of marriage because it will not stop with the redefinition of marriage.

Justice Kennedy's opinion follows directly in the line with his opinions written in 2003 in the Lawrence case and in 2013 in the Windsor case. In the most crucial section of the argument, Kennedy writes,

“These considerations lead to the conclusion that the right to marry is a fundamental right inherent in the liberty of the person, and under the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment, couples of the same-sex may not be deprived of that right and that liberty.”

Now what we need to note there is the assertion of certain things that never have been asserted before. In the first place that marriage *“is a fundamental right”* in this sense; in the sense it would include, or even could include same sex couples.

The other thing we need to note is that the actual wording of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution; the actual wording of its due process and equal protection clauses that were cited here, the actual wording never cites marriage at all. Not only does it not cite anything that would include so called “same sex marriage”; it doesn't include marriage at all. The most important aspect of the majority opinion in this case is that it isn't actually much of a legal argument at all. It certainly isn't a Constitutional argument. And no one made that point more eloquently than the Chief Justice of the United States when he wrote in his dissent, ***“The majority's decision is an act of will, not a legal judgment.”***

The Chief Justice openly accused the majority in this case of imposing their moral judgment, not any informed or rational legal judgement, on the Constitution of the United States and thus on the Nation. At the very end of his very eloquent dissent, in a paragraph that indicates that the Chief Justice actually is “for” same sex marriage, he just didn't believe it was a

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constitutional right, he acknowledges that there will be those who will celebrate this decision but then he writes, ***“But do not celebrate the Constitution. It had nothing to do with it. I respectfully dissent.”***

Elsewhere in his dissent, the Chief Justice says that the majority’s reason has far more to do with philosophy than with the law. The Chief said,

“The Court today not only overlooks our country’s entire history and tradition but actively repudiates it, preferring to live only in the heady days of the here and now.”

The Chief Justice of the United States, joined by other dissenters, points to the fact that one of the most devastating aspects of this decision is the fact that the majority actually vilifies the opposition. It declares that there is no rational basis for any opposition to same sex marriage; to the right of same sex couples to marry. And not only that, the majority claims that the only basis for opposing same sex marriage is moral “animus” – that is an irrational moral judgement that should have no public consequence and should not be allowed to have any influence in terms of the life of the nation.

And thus, as the Chief Justice and the other dissenters pointed out, the majority basically says that every previous Supreme Court; every previous Justice of that court; every previous American and the majority of the States of the United States of America, right now are operating out of a moral animus that must be corrected by the action of a 5-4 majority of the United States Supreme Court. In so doing, as Justice Scalia was very clear, the majority on this court has simply substituted its own moral judgment for the Constitution of the United States and for the operation of a representative Constitutional democracy.

Whereas just the day before in the Burwell decision the Supreme Court said it was acting in deference to the Legislature, as Justice Scalia made very clear today, in the case of same sex marriage the court has decided to be the Legislature. He then writes, speaking of the majority opinion,

“This is a naked judicial claim to legislative—indeed, super-legislative—power; a claim fundamentally at odds with our system of government. Except as limited by a constitutional prohibition agreed to by the People, the States are free to adopt whatever laws they like, even those that offend the esteemed Justices’ “reasoned judgment.”

He then writes these very chilling words,

“A system of government that makes the People subordinate to a committee of nine unelected lawyers does not deserve to be called a democracy.”

Getting right to the point, Justice Samuel Alito wrote in his dissent to the majority opinion,

“Today’s decision usurps the constitutional right of the people to decide whether to keep or alter the traditional understanding of marriage. The decision will also have other important consequences.”

He then writes these words of clear warning,

“It will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy.”

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Once again we are not talking about someone on the margins of American political life; we're talking about a sitting Justice of the United States Supreme Court saying that this judgment will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy.

And not only was it said by Justice Alito, it was said by Justice Thomas. It was said by Justice Scalia. It was said by the Chief Justice of the United States, John G. Roberts Jr. All four of those Justices; three associate Justices and the Chief Justice of the United States, have told us that this decision, handed down today, will be used to vilify those who will not join the new moral orthodoxy.

Further words of warning from Justice Alito included these,

“Today’s decision will also have a fundamental effect on this Court and its ability to uphold the rule of law. If a bare majority of Justices can invent a new right and impose that right on the rest of the country, the only real limit on what future majorities will be able to do is their own sense of what those with political power and cultural influence are willing to tolerate.”

He then goes on to say,

“Even enthusiastic supporters of same-sex marriage should worry about the scope of the power that today’s majority claims.”

Even in the days leading up to the release of this decision, it was interesting that many in the mainstream secular media all of a sudden began publically to acknowledge the inevitable conflict between same sex marriage and religious liberty. Justice Thomas in his dissent wrote these words,

“...marriage is not simply a governmental institution; it is a religious institution as well. Today’s decision might change the former, but it cannot change the latter. It appears all but inevitable that the two will come into conflict, particularly as individuals and churches are confronted with demands to participate in and endorse civil marriages between same-sex couples.”

Justice Thomas then wrote,

“The majority appears unmoved by that inevitability. It makes only a weak gesture toward religious liberty in a single paragraph.”

So we should look carefully at that single paragraph that Justice Thomas mentions as being so inadequate. If anything, his estimation of his inadequacy is an understatement. Justice Kennedy wrote,

“Finally, it must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered.”

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Now notice very closely how Justice Kennedy, in writing that paragraph, limited religious liberty merely to teaching the precepts of our faith. That's all it represents. We need to note that is NOT religious liberty as guaranteed in the free exercise and non-establishment clauses of the United States Constitution. The free exercise of our faith is not limited by the First Amendment of the Constitution to merely teaching. Once again it is very hard to overestimate meaning of this decision just as it related to the institution of marriage. That's because in a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court of the United States effectively redefined marriage all across this Nation, in all fifty States. It states there is a constitutional right for same sex couples to demand to be married and thus there is no right for a State to define marriage in any way that would limit the access of same sex couples to that institution.

And so what we are going to see, virtually immediately, is the fact that marriage is going to be redefined right before our eyes. And as we have so often discussed, when it comes to the redefinition of marriage, it is not simply a matter of including same sex couples in an otherwise exclusively heterosexual institution. What the majority of the court did in the decision, was to suggest that they were actually acting on behalf of children. And yet their opinion makes children incidental to marriage. Because what the court requires today is a definition, a redefinition of marriage in which procreation is no longer necessarily a part of the picture at all; not even in terms of potential or possibility.

As damaging as that legal argument is, we need to consider it's more damaging than even it appears on its face. And that was made clear by the Chief Justice when he wrote this section of his dissent,

“It is striking how much of the majority’s reasoning would apply with equal force to the claim of a fundamental right to plural marriage.” “If,” he writes quoting from the decision ‘[t]here is dignity in the bond between two men or two women who seek to marry and in their autonomy to make such profound choices,’ he goes on to say, “why would there be any less dignity in the bond between three people who, in exercising their autonomy, seek to make the profound choice to marry?” “If a same-sex couple has the constitutional right to marry because their children would otherwise,” (he again is quoting now from the decision of the majority) ‘suffer the stigma of knowing their families are somehow lesser,’ (the Chief then says), “why wouldn’t the same reasoning apply to a family of three or more persons raising children? If not having the opportunity to marry,” again he cites the majority opinion, ‘serves to disrespect and subordinate’ gay and lesbian couples,” the Chief then asks, then “why wouldn’t the same ‘imposition of this disability,’ serve to disrespect and subordinate people who find fulfillment in polyamorous relationships?”

Directly aiming himself at Justice Kennedy and his opinion with the majority, the Chief then says,

“I do not mean to equate marriage between same-sex couples with plural marriages in all respects. There may well be relevant differences that compel different legal analysis.” “But if there are,” he says, “petitioners [that is those who brought the case arguing for the legalization of same sex marriage] have not pointed to any. When asked about a plural marital union at oral argument, petitioners asserted that a State ‘doesn’t have such an institution.’” The Chief then said, “But that is exactly the point: the States at issue here do not have an institution of same-sex marriage, either.”

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That means that the Chief Justice of the United States has sent a clear warning that the logic of this case will not stop with the affirmation of same sex marriage. That is a case we have been making for months and for years. And now, once again, it is not being said by someone as an observer of the court; those words were written by the Chief Justice of the United States of America.

And thus, the decision handed down today by the Supreme Court of the United States is not only devastating to the institution of marriage, it is also devastating to the very existence of democracy here in the States. And we're talking about the unexpected arrival and impact of a decision that was even worse than we might have imagined. And we're talking about dissents offered by four sitting Justices of the United States Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice of the United States, warning that nothing less than democracy is at stake.

The most important development was the decision handed down by the Supreme Court. But the other most interesting developments related to this are found in the responses that came once the decision was announced. The President of the United States immediately celebrated the decision, even as, you recall, in 2008, he had run on a platform opposed to the legalization of same sex marriage. He came to affirm it by his own process of what he called "evolution" by the time he ran for re-election in 2012. But the White House website, that is the official website of the President of the United States, openly celebrated in every way imaginable the decision handed down by the United States Supreme Court. President Obama had put the power of his administration behind the case for same sex marriage. His own chief lawyer, the solicitor general of the United States, made the administration's case before the court and almost immediately after the decision was handed down, a portrait of the White House in rainbow colors was released on the official website of the President of the United States.

For Christians looking at these developments there are many reasons for concern and for prayer for our Nation. There is also a very clear alarm telling us that the context of our own lives, families, marriages and ministries has changed utterly before our eyes. That process of change did not begin with the decision handed down on Friday. But that day is a moment of undeniable importance. What happened on Friday change the course of history when it comes to the United States of America. And, as we have seen, not only on the urgent question of marriage, the essential question of marriage; but also on the question as to whether or for how long the United States of America will operate as a constitutional republic.

But Christians must also understand that the law, important as it is, was never the most important issue here. Even as the Chief Justice said that the majority opinion was actually a moral (or immoral) judgment disguised as a constitutional argument, we need to understand that it was the moral issue that was always paramount here. The quest on the part of those who are seeking same sex marriage was not just, it was never just limited to access to the institution of marriage and to the any number of legal privileges that come with the institution of marriage. It was always rooted in a quest for the affirmation of their own sexual orientation and lifestyle; the affirmation of their relationships. What they are after is what Paul describes in Romans 1:32, ***"and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things (including homosexuality) are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."***

Writing almost immediately after the opinion was released, Frank Bruni, a columnist for the New York Times, in a rather lengthy essay came down to the final paragraph which I now read. He says,

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“the Supreme Court’s decision wasn’t simply about weddings. It was about worth. From the highest of this nation’s perches, in the most authoritative of this nation’s voices, a majority of justices told a minority of Americans that they’re normal and that they belong — fully, joyously and with cake.”

Christians looking at a statement like that have to be not only concerned, but heart-broken. When we understand what is behind the quest for the legalization of same sex marriage. It’s never been just about marriage. That’s been abundantly clear. It’s about moral sanction. It’s about moral approval. It’s about celebration of same sex relationships. And now, Frank Bruni, writing on behalf of thousands, says that the Supreme Court’s ruling will lead to that celebration. And make no mistake, there are those in this society who would do everything within their power to coerce that celebration; to coerce it from churches, and Christian institutions, and Christian schools, and Christian citizens. But the thing we need to note with the greatest heartbreak is that **declaring something normal doesn’t make it normal**. Not when it runs into a head on collision with God’s intention in creation and with God’s authority in His Word, and with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Marriage was understood and defined well before there was a United States and a Supreme Court with nine justices. This court, nor this nation has a fundamental right to redefine that which they did not define in the first place.

One of the most devastating aspects of this is not just the damage this will do to marriage and to marriages, to children and to society at large; not only the direct religious liberty threat this now represents in the collision between same sex marriage and Christian conviction; one of the saddest aspects is that this simply can’t deliver on the promises of those who were behind the effort in the first place. Our society may now, by virtue of the authority of the United States Supreme Court, declare the legal reality of same sex marriage, but it can’t, it can’t possibly actually “normalize” same sex relationships as being the same as the conjugal union of a man and a woman in marriage.

Finally, when it comes to the coercing of this new moral regime, one of the most interesting developments that came very shortly after the decision of the Supreme Court was released was an editorial statement that came a newspaper in Harrisburg, PA. The headline of their editorial, “The Supremes Got It Right – It’s No Longer Gay Marriage; It’s Marriage And We’re Better For It”. What’s most remarkable about this editorial is how it concludes. The paper writes this,

“As a result of Friday’s ruling, PennLive/The Patriot-News will very strictly limit op-Eds and letters to the editor in opposition to same-sex marriage. These unions are now the law of the land. And we would not entertain such criticisms that these unions are morally wrong or unnatural any more than we would entertain criticisms of interracial marriage, or those claiming that women are less equal than men in the eyes of the law.”¹

That paragraph was actually a somewhat softer version of the immediate statement made by the paper in which it said there would be no publication of any such op-Ed’s and letters to the editor; now they say the use of such arguments will be strictly limited and for a limited time. And

¹ It is interesting that this quote was edited after Al Mohler referenced it to read as follows; “As a result of Friday’s ruling, ***PennLive/The Patriot-News*** will very strictly limit op-Eds and letters to the editor in opposition to same-sex marriage. These unions are now the law of the land. And we will not publish such letters and op-Eds any more than we would publish those that are racist, sexist or anti-Semitic.”

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we need to note exactly what's going on here. We're being told that the Supreme Court of the United States its ruling on same sex marriage, ended the argument. The debate is over. Same sex marriage is now a fact. And, as this newspaper says, so far as the United States Supreme Court is concerned, there is no such thing as "same sex marriage" – there is only marriage; and it may be enjoyed by same sex couples or opposite sex couples – it really doesn't matter.

And this is where the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has to understand that as much of the society around us, for any number of reasons, is going to be saying, "The debate is over; the issue is settled." Beloved, it is far from over. It can't be. It won't be. Christians operating out of a biblical worldview have to understand all that is at stake here- far more than the society around us recognizes, and far more even than we may have anticipated just a few days ago. Al Mohler, President of Southern Seminary, the flagship training institution of the Southern Baptists, released the following statement to the press immediately after the Supreme Court decision was handed down. He said,

"In one sense, everything has changed. And yet, nothing has changed. The cultural and legal landscape has changed, as we believe this will lead to very real harms to our neighbors. But our Christian responsibility has not changed. We are charged to uphold marriage as the union of a man and a woman and to speak the truth in love. We are also commanded to uphold the truth about marriage in our own lives, in our own marriages, in our own families, and in our own churches.

We are called to be the people of the truth, even when the truth is not popular and even when the truth is denied by the culture around us. Christians have found themselves in this position before, and we will again. God's truth has not changed. The Holy Scriptures have not changed. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has not changed. The church's mission has not changed. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

So how should the church respond? Let me close some encouraging words from Russel Moore, a faithful pastor. He exhorted...²

First of all, the church should not panic. The Supreme Court can do many things, but the Supreme Court cannot get Jesus back in that tomb. Jesus of Nazareth is still alive. He is still calling the universe toward his kingdom.

Moreover, while this decision will ultimately hurt many people and families and civilization itself, the gospel doesn't need "family values" to flourish. In fact, the church often thrives when it is in sharp contrast to the cultures around it. That was the case in Ephesus and Philippi and Corinth and Rome, which held to marriage views out of step with the Scriptures.

The church will need to clearly articulate what we believe about marriage from God's Word; we can no longer assume that people agree with us, or even understand us. Let's not simply talk about marriage in terms of values or culture or human flourishing. Let's talk about marriage the way Jesus and the apostles taught us to — as bound up with the gospel itself, a picture of the union of Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:32).

As we do so, we must not just articulate our views of marriage, we must embody a gospel marriage culture. We have done a poor job of that in the past. Too many of our marriages have been ravaged by divorce. Too often we've neglected church discipline in the cases of those who

² I did edit these some to make it flow for this message

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have unrepentantly destroyed their marriages. We must repent of our failings and picture to the world what marriage is meant to be, and keep the light lit to the old paths.

This gives the church an opportunity to do what Jesus called us to do with our marriages in the first place: to serve as a light in a dark place. Permanent, stable marriages with families with both a mother and a father may well make us seem freakish in 21st-century culture. We should not fear that. We believe stranger things than that. We believe a previously dead man is alive, and will show up in the Eastern skies on a horse. We believe that the gospel can forgive sinners like us and make us sons and daughters. Let's embrace the sort of freakishness that saves.

Let's also recognize that given this "new" morality, many people will be disappointed in getting what they want. Many of our neighbors believe that a redefined concept of marriage will simply expand the institution (and, let's be honest, many will want it to keep on expanding). People will be disappointed in their new found sexual freedom. The church must prepare for the refugees from the sexual revolution. We must prepare for those, like the sexually wayward Woman at the Well of Samaria, who will be thirsting for water of which they don't even know.

There are two sorts of churches that will not be able to reach the sexual revolution's refugees. A church that has given up on the truth of the Scriptures, including on marriage and sexuality, and has nothing to say to a fallen world. And a church that screams with outrage at those who disagree will have nothing to say to those who are looking for a new birth.

We must stand with conviction and with kindness, with truth and with grace. We must hold to our views and love those who hate us for them. We must not only speak Christian truths; we must speak with a Christian accent. We must say what Jesus has revealed, and we must say those things the way Jesus does — with mercy and with an invitation to new life.

Some Christians will be tempted to anger, lashing out at the world around us with a narrative of decline. That temptation is wrong. God decided when we would be born, and when we would be born again. We have the Spirit and the gospel. To think that we deserve to live in different times is to tell God that we deserve a better mission field than the one he has given us.

The witness to marriage will be a long-term strategy that is multi-pronged. This is no time for fear or outrage or politicizing. We see that we are strangers and exiles in American culture. We are on the wrong side of history, just like we started. We should have been all along. Let's seek the kingdom. Let's stand with the gospel. Let's fear our God. But let's not fear our mission field.

Soli Deo Gloria

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