

Saying 'I Do' When God Says 'I Don't'

Same-Sex Marriage through the Lenses of Faith

The Upward Look

Here's the 24/7 headline news that never changes and we cannot afford to forget: God is still sovereign and the 'supreme' court has not relocated to Washington D.C, it is still in heaven (Ps. 115:3). God will never outsource his job as ultimate judge and our security never depends upon those who occupy the White House, but the One who occupies the eternal throne. According to Isaiah 33:22, God is judge, lawgiver, and king. This means that God is the ultimate authority of the judicial branch, legislative branch, and executive branch, and all decisions made by any human government are ultimately accountable to Him (Rom. 13:1). As Kenneth Ulmer said, "the court cannot redefine what they did not design." Since God created marriage, He has the right to define it. The Bible is clear and consistent regarding what marriage is: *The joining together by God and before God of a man and a woman in an intimate, exclusive, and life-long covenant relationship that is designed to reflect the love of God as fully expressed in Jesus Christ, and also to function as the foundation for family and society.* We cannot depend upon corrupt governments that are pimped by the politics of personality to make good on justice in a way that will establish right relationships within society. After all, we live in a world that justified itself in executing a man who lived a perfect life by treating him as the worst of criminals.

If God is in control, then what in the world is He up to? Romans 1:18-32 provides perspective regarding how *God's wrath is presently being revealed by turning us over* to that which we think we want. Ironically, we assume that when we do what we desire (like redefine marriage and a number of other things) that it is an expression of freedom, but it is in reality an act of God's judgment. The Good News however is that God's wrath presently revealed sets the stage for proclaiming the gospel of God's grace. So then, it turns out to be a bitter-sweet situation because it is through the catalyst of judgment that God ushers in His salvation. If we never knew how badly off we were, we would never sense our need for Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Biblical scholar James Hamilton wrote a book entitled *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* in which he demonstrates that there is an established pattern throughout the thread of Scripture, that even judgment is a redemptive tool in God's hand. So, though we mourn in light of the severity of God's judgment upon those who are without God, we celebrate and anticipate God opening doors that lead to the proclamation of the Gospel of reconciliation. Opposition never frustrates the plan of God; it accomplishes it. This is not death knell of Christianity, rather it is under these kind of conditions that the gospel thrives.

The Inward Look

How has the church contributed to the corruption of society (treatment of marriage and sex)? We can't afford to merely look out of the window into the world, but we must look at ourselves through a mirror. How can we expect a godless world to submit to a God who is not taken seriously by His own people? Do you remember why Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed; not merely because of the pervasiveness of wickedness, but the absence of righteousness (Gen. 19:25-33). Christ did not say upon this rock I'll build my United States, rather He committed Himself to building a community of believers who would serve as the continuation of His ministry on earth. The church serves not as a supplement for the nation, but as an alternative to all nations. We complain that the government kicks out prayer, but we often treat prayer as either a showcase or a side-dish in our places of worship, and hardly pray at home. We complain that our children are taught evolution, but do not take the time to teach them creation theology and its implications for engaging the world. We critique the culture for being racist, but churches often preach a Jim Crow Jesus who serves an agenda centered around culture rather than a mission centered around Christ. We grieve over our nation's sexual immorality but not our own. If we are to position ourselves to make an impact, we must first adopt a posture of repentance. Repentance consists of a change of heart and mind that results in a change in direction.

Our singing and shouting will not make up for our sin; our praise and preaching will not cover up our perversion; our attendance will not make up for our adultery; our hallelujahs will not hide our homosexuality; our hollering won't hide our whoring; the organ will not drown out our unauthorized orgies and orgasms; our offering will not cover up our oppression; our hilarious giving won't make up for our hateful gossip; our 'thank you' will not cover up our thieving; our lifted hands will not make up for our lying tongue; our service will not cover up our slander; our undignified praise will not make up for our unforgiving spirit; our 'high-fives' will not make up for our deep-hatred; our buildings will not make up for our BULL. Real repentance does not begin with clapping hands, but a changed heart that results in a changed life that expresses itself in restored relationships.

In addition to taking an honest, critical assessment of ourselves, we must recapture and articulate a comprehensive biblical view of relationships; not just regarding marriage, but we must re-examine God's design for parents, children, siblings, friends, those of another race, etc. Please remember that everything that made major news the week of the court's decision was a relational issue: The racist attack on the Charleston church; the confederate flag debate; the same-sex marriage decision. We must regain a biblical view of humanity that traces our identity back to our Creator; we can then rediscover our roles and responsibilities to each other in light of His purpose rather than our preferences. We must revisit God's definition of Himself, ourselves, and our world. Only the Trinitarian God who is intrinsically and eternally relational has the blueprint for healthy relationships, and the Church of Jesus Christ has been given the privilege of modeling that unity to the world (John 17: 20-23).

The Outward Look

We must view this transition as an opportunity to build relational bridges that can lead to the proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus ate with sinners not because he endorsed their self-destructive path, but He knew that in order to make an impact you must first make contact. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation; the church is the only community in the world that has been given this mandate. We must position ourselves within relational reach of those who are without the gospel of the grace of God; we must be prepared to tell them about the 'great exchange' (2 Cor. 5). Our sin has been placed on Christ and He suffered the consequences in our place, so that all who believe on Him will receive His righteousness and the benefits that come with that. Now in order to say that Christ died to free us from sin, you can't downplay sin; if there is no sense of sin, there is no sense for a Savior.

Our agenda is not to merely to 'be kind to gays'. As a matter of fact, we should not engage any sinner on the basis of a 'demographic'. They are people who have names, created in the image and likeness of God who, like us, are fallen and in desperate need of the reconciling grace of God. We enter into authentic relationships with them without compromising the gospel. How do we love those who either endorse or embrace same-sex marriage? Well, in order to answer that question we must first know the definition of love. ***Love is an unconditional, sacrificial commitment to invest for the best of the other person.*** There are only two kinds of people within your relational reach; those who are saved and those who are not. To the unsaved, our ***loving message*** is that homosexuality and lesbianism is sin that Christ died for, and if they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, He will love them enough to accept them where they are (John 1:12;), and will give them new life which frees them from sin (John 8:33-34). If the person is saved, our ***loving message*** is that Christ not only forgives sin, gives us the power to forsake sin. As a community of believers we do not celebrate the sin that Christ died to save us from (Rom. 6). If you are going to ***invest for the best of the other person***, you must tell them the truth that sin is not an investment in the best. Sin keeps you from reaching the potential for which you were created; to glorify Him. Sin, in any form, is self-destructive and community destructive. You are not showing love by being an encouraging enabler who does not confront them with what will destroy them. We must remind our easily offended friends that everyone that kisses them is not kind, and everyone that hurts them isn't hateful (Pro. 27:6).

The Backward Look

As we look at our history (American, Black, and Biblical) we can gain instruction for how to handle this moment. The same-sex ruling was based (although illegitimately in my estimation) on the fourteenth amendment. We must consider that if white supremacy and its treatment towards African-Americans had not been the order of the day, there would not have been a fourteenth amendment that has now been used as a precedent for same-sex marriage. The chickens are coming home to roost on a wickedly ironic path. This should serve as a corrective to those who would presently espouse white supremacy (in any form) to utterly abandon it; you

have to want what comes with it. On the other hand, African-Americans have been done a grave injustice by these justices who have associated citizenship for African-Americans with freedom for same-sex marriage. We must distance ourselves from this distortion of freedom that attempts to ride on our black backs without paying the historical fare.

The African-American evangelical Christian must redeem the biblical concept of freedom by regaining the language of liberation that leads to transformation found in biblical history. We must call our so-called leaders into question who would betray the faith that brought us for a cheap freedom that is divorced from the God who redeems us to worship Him. Biblical freedom is never moral autonomy where you get to choose good and evil on your own terms; remember that this is what got Eve in trouble. God never frees us to ourselves, but He frees us to be slaves to Himself. ***Freedom not only has an exit, it must have a destination.*** We often chant 'Let my people go' (that's the exit); but the rest of the verse is 'that they may serve me in the wilderness' (that's the destination). (Ex. 7:16). That term 'serve' is the same word translated 'worship'. Remember that worship of Yahweh can never be reduced to a Sunday morning celebration: Worship is yielding all that we are and all that we have to our worthy King in trust and submission within every arena of life. The wisdom of gaining insight from hindsight is embedded in the song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*:

*"God of our weary years God of our silent tears, Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way
Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path we pray
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world we forget Thee"*

Forward Look

This world is not getting any better; this is not pessimism, it is realism. The bible declares that we are to expect a downward spiral of depravity the closer we get to the coming of Christ (2 Tim. 3:1-5). This is a hostile place for Christians; if they killed our Christ we can't expect them to bake us cookies and say welcome to the neighborhood. As strangers and aliens we have no civil rights, and whatever rights we enjoy at any given time can be taken away (1 Pet. 2:11-12). If the world is characterized by sin and our message is that Christ came to take it away, those conditions are conducive for persecution. We also declare a Gospel that flies in the face of buffet religion because this Gospel declares that there is no other way to be saved except through faith in Christ. That is the offensive message and has historically gotten us in trouble. Will we lose our tax exempt status? Will we be criminalized because of 'hate speech'? Will we lose the perks and accessories of Christianity? It may happen. However, we must remember that whatever can be taken away is NOT the church. Christ promised that the community that he builds cannot even be destroyed by death because its durability is guaranteed by His resurrection. (Matt. 16:18-21).

In the midst of an antagonistic world, we are instructed to live in light of the coming kingdom (Rom. 13:11-4). Remember that light shines best in dark places. Although it is fallen, our world is given to us as stewardship; it is the stage upon which God is pleased to display His glory through *cracked containers* who will evangelize the lost and edify the saved. That being the case,

we must take a redemptive approach that seeks to make an impact within our relational reach. If you had the next Supreme Justice in your youth ministry, how would you prepare them to administer justice in a way that honors God? What would you have them read? If you had the future President or Attorney General in your home, how would you prepare them to carry out their assignment in a way that pleases God? How are we equipping believers to live out their faith within the arena in which they have been divinely assigned? We can do this confidently and courageously because we don't live upon the basis of results; we live in light of the reality of the resurrection that guarantees that our ministry is not a waste of time (I Cor. 15:58).

Now, people have the tendency to have the right information but draw the wrong conclusion. So for the sake of clarity, just because this world is not going to get better, that is not a reason to retreat and excuse yourself from engaging. You may say, well what's the point if it's all going to hell in a hand basket? First, the reason why God left you here is to give you an opportunity to serve as a walking, talking, visible manifestation of His glory within the context of a broken world. So IT is worth it because GOD is worth it. Second, do you believe that one day you will die? If the answer is yes, then why do you protect, clean, feed, nurse, and groom your body which you know will ultimately decay? I mean, what's the point? The answer is obvious, although it will eventually decay, God is pleased to use this body right now as an instrument that represents Him in a broken world; and I'm responsible as a faithful steward to guard and govern it until checkout time. We must view our world the same way, although it destined to decay, we are stewards of it until its groaning gives way to glory (Rom. 8:18-25).

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