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SCOTUS, So-Called Same-Sex Marriage, and the Church Ephesians 5:25-33

[First a word about what this sermon is *not* going to cover. As important as it is, I will not address what the Bible says about same-sex attraction and behavior or that of transgenderism. Furthermore, my aim today is not to respond to the arguments of those who advocate for the moral legitimacy of same-sex attraction. There are plenty of accessible resources for this, two of which are: Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* (Crossway), and Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (The Good Book Company). Neither will I address the subjective of reparative therapy, as it has been called. Finally, I'm certain there are other practical and relational issues that you might wish I would address, and perhaps at another time I will. But not today. My focus today will be on the recent SCOTUS decision that legalized so-called "same-sex marriage" in all 50 states and how we should understand and respond to it.]

Let's be clear about one thing right up front. Let this be the clarion call that comes forth from our mouths and our lives: ***God the Son became incarnate in the man Christ Jesus to live a perfect life, die a sacrificial death, and rise from the dead precisely so that he might redeem, save, and cleanse from all guilt and shame not only homosexual and transgender sinners, but heterosexual sinners as well.*** This forms the backbone, so to speak, of Bridgeway's official statement concerning homosexuality, which reads as follows:

(1) We believe that heterosexuality is God's revealed will for humankind and that, since God is loving, a chaste and faithful expression of this divine design (whether in singleness or in the marriage relationship between one man and one woman) is the ideal to which he calls all people.

(2) We believe that homosexual behavior and same-sex attraction are a result of the fall of humanity into a sinful condition that pervades every person. Whatever biological or familial roots of homosexuality may be discovered, we do not believe that these would sanction or excuse homosexual behavior, though they would deepen our compassion and patience for those who are struggling to be free from sexual temptations.

(3) We believe there is hope for the person who struggles with same-sex attraction and that Jesus Christ offers a healing alternative in which the power of sin is broken and the person is freed to know and experience his or her true identity in Christ and in the fellowship of his Church. We also believe that those guilty of heterosexual sin can find healing, freedom, and forgiveness through the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

(4) We believe that this freedom is attained through a process which includes not only recognizing homosexual behavior as a sin but also renouncing the practice of it. Sexual holiness also comes through the rediscovery of healthy, non-erotic friendships with people of the same sex; embracing a moral sexual lifestyle; pursuing Spirit-filled counseling, discipleship, and healing prayer, and in the age to come, rising from the dead with a new body free from every sinful impulse. This process parallels the similar process of sanctification needed in dealing with heterosexual sin and temptations as well. We believe that this freedom comes first and foremost through faith in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(5) We believe that all persons have been created in the image of God and should be accorded human dignity. We believe therefore that hateful, fearful, unconcerned harassment of persons with same-sex attraction should be repudiated. We believe that respect for persons with same-sex attraction involves, honest, reasoned, nonviolent sharing of facts concerning the immorality and liability of homosexual behavior. On the other hand, endorsing behavior which the Bible disapproves endangers persons and dishonors God.

(6) We believe that Christian churches should reach out in love and truth to minister to people touched by homosexuality, and that those who contend biblically against their own sexual temptation should be patiently assisted in their battle, not ostracized or disdained. However, the more prominent a leadership role

or modeling role a person holds in a church or institution, the higher will be the expectations for God's ideal of sexual obedience and wholeness. We affirm that both heterosexual and homosexual persons should find help in the church to engage in the biblical battle against all improper sexual thoughts and behaviors.

(This statement was adopted and approved by the Board of Elders on February 21, 2012)

My approach today will be to ask and then answer several related questions.

What did the Court rule?

This question can be answered very shortly and simply. The Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment requires a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and that all states are also required to recognize same-sex marriages validly performed out of state. Justice Kennedy, in his opinion for the majority, wrote: "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. Same-sex couples may exercise the fundamental right to marry."

What is remarkably missing from this statement is any attempt to define what he means by the word "marry" or "marriage". What is "marriage"? Where did the majority on the Court derive their definition? By what moral authority did they arrive at their understanding of what is typically called "marriage"? It is quite clear, as Justices Roberts and Scalia both noted in their dissenting opinion, that the majority on the Court simply redefined the word "marriage" in direct opposition to how it has been understood in cultures and societies for thousands of years. The basis on which they did this will become evident soon.

99.8% of human cultures have considered male-female complementarity to be of the essence of marriage, and even in our culture almost everyone understood marriage this way, until the last 5-10 years, including President Obama. As Chief Justice John Roberts put it, this view of marriage has "formed the basis of human society for millennia, for the Kalahari Bushmen and the Han Chinese, the Carthaginians and the Aztecs."

So, marriage as the covenant union between one man and one woman that every virtually society has historically recognized is cast aside in the space of a decade and the fundamental values on which it is based are turned upside down and inside out.

What we must keep in mind is that the state did not create marriage or the family. God did. The state cannot define or redefine marriage and the family. Its definition comes from Scripture. Scripture is unequivocal that a marriage only exists where one man and one woman enter into a covenant with each other.

What will likely be the immediate and long-term consequences of the SCOTUS decision?

For one thing, Colleges, Universities, and other institutions that maintain biblical standards of sexual morality will likely run the risk of closure. For them to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages and for them to withhold access to married housing of so-called same-sex couples, just to cite one example, will put their tax-exempt status in jeopardy. Not long ago the government revoked the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University because it prohibited inter-racial dating and inter-racial marriage. And rightly so. Bob Jones University accepted the consequences but eventually changed its policy in 2000. And no, there is no parallel whatsoever between issues of race and sexuality. But what the government did to Bob Jones with regard to race it will do to other institutions with regard to homosexuality.

Examples of this have already occurred. The most recent instance involved Gordon College, a Christian liberal arts school near Boston, Massachusetts. Gordon College faced the possibility of losing its official accreditation after the New England Associations of Schools and Colleges asked it to review how its policies affect gay students. The school has decided to maintain its position on sexuality, which prohibits student or faculty sex outside of heterosexual marriage. The results are yet to be known.

As for us, there may come a time when Bridgeway Church and every other Bible-believing church will be told it must perform so-called same-sex marriages and admit practicing homosexual persons into full membership or lose

its tax-exempt status when it comes to personal property taxes. A time is likely coming when your contributions to this church will no longer be legitimate deductions on your income tax return because I and the other pastors here refuse to perform same-sex marriages or refuse to allow outsiders to perform such so-called “marriages” in our facilities. ***So be it. Surely you don’t think we hold to our beliefs because it’s easy and that we would quickly give them up if it became financially costly?***

Has our culture taken a decisive shift away from biblical standards of truth and morality? Of course it has. But that’s nothing new. That has been happening ever since Adam and Eve made their disastrous decision in the Garden of Eden. [Note: Twenty years ago only 27% of Americans supported so-called same-sex marriage. Today approximately 60% do.]

What’s new in this recent development is what John Piper calls “***normalization and institutionalization.***”

“The new thing — new for America, and new for history — is not homosexuality. That brokenness has been here since we were all broken in the fall of man. (And there is a great distinction between the orientation and the act — just like there is a great difference between my orientation to pride and the act of boasting.) What’s new is not even the celebration and approval of homosexual sin. Homosexual behavior has been exploited, and reveled in, and celebrated in art, for millennia. What’s new is normalization and institutionalization. This is the new calamity.”

Should we prepare ourselves to be ridiculed and deprived of basic human liberties that we have come to take for granted in America? Yes. That is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. A day may come when Bridgeway Church will be closed by force of arms, padlocked, its finances confiscated and its leadership imprisoned. Even then we will refuse to compromise our convictions or violate our conscience as governed by God’s Word. That is not the rant of an ideologue. It is the solemn promise of your pastor.

We can assuredly expect that the church will become increasingly ***marginalized*** in our society and viewed as a ***cultural dinosaur*** with little of significance to contribute to our world. But the church has always been counter-cultural. The church, when it is being the church, always has and always will be in conflict with the mainstream culture. We don’t want to look like the world or reflect its values. And that is a good thing. It helps us. It requires that we think clearly about what we believe. It also provides tremendous opportunity for witness.

Everyone has predicted in one form or another that ***persecution is coming to the church in America***. But when it comes it will not be of the same sort as found in Iran or Indonesia or North Korea. It is doubtful that in our lifetime we will ever be beaten or beheaded here in the U.S. The persecution we encounter will more likely take the form of: (1) social ostracism; (2) lost business opportunities; (3) slander, mockery, and ridicule; (4) loss of tax exempt status for churches, contributions, schools, etc.; (5) threats to our exercise of free speech with the result being temporary imprisonment, fines, etc.

Very soon, unless it’s already happened, the most vicious accusation against Christians won’t be hypocrisy. That will be a thing of the past. The most vicious and common accusation against Christians will be ***hate-filled bigotry***. We will no longer be accused of high-minded moral superiority but of a lowly moral inferiority. There is no escaping the fact that things are going to get much more difficult for all evangelical, Bible-believing Christians. We are going to have to learn how to ***live as exiles in our own country*** (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11).

Why would we ever think or expect that unregenerate people whose worldview is decidedly opposite from our own will agree with us or enjoy living according to our moral standards? There is no reason to think or expect that they will be amenable to the idea of even letting us live freely in accord with our views. The Christian faith always has been and always will be a threat to every non-Christian who lives.

By what moral authority did SCOTUS render their decision?

I don’t want to come across as overly simplistic, but ***the debate in our society over homosexuality, transgenderism, and same-sex marriage is first and fundamentally about moral authority***. Everyone has a moral authority, even people who by our judgment are extremely immoral. Everyone makes choices about right and wrong based upon it.

For us as Christians our moral authority is the Bible. We believe there is one and only one God who has revealed himself and his will in the Bible.

Therefore, the issue is not whether morality will be reflected in our laws and imposed on our society, but which morality. Let me illustrate. Although I disagree with Luke Timothy Johnson of Emory University, I have great respect for his honesty. He is an accomplished NT scholar but denies many of the teachings of the Scriptures. Not long ago he acknowledged that he and his liberal seminary colleagues “do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to ***another authority*** when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. . . . We are fully aware of the weight of scriptural evidence pointing away from our position, yet place our trust in the power of the living God to reveal as powerfully through personal experience and testimony as through written texts.”

Dr. William Loader agrees with Johnson. Loader is perhaps the most prominent expert on ancient and biblical views of sexuality. He will be the first to tell you, and has done so in his books, that the Bible nowhere supports or endorses homosexual behavior and same-sex marriage as a legitimate moral option. And yet you would think that Loader had every reason in the world to conclude otherwise, given the fact that he is a vocal advocate of same-sex marriage who applauds it in our world.

What Johnson and Loader are saying is that anyone who knows anything about the Bible must in the final analysis acknowledge that it is unequivocally opposed to any and all same-sex intimacy.

But Johnson and Loader are equally clear that they have chosen to reject the teaching of Scripture, concluding that it is wrong. On what basis do they do this? Johnson in particular does it on the basis of what he calls “personal experience and testimony,” by which he means his own personal subjective feelings and preferences together with the “testimony” of others who claim that same-sex marriages are good and holy and loving and acceptable. ***So, in rejecting one moral authority, the Bible, Johnson and others embrace yet another: self.*** Now, there is a great deal that goes into what I call “self”. But make no mistake: Self decides what is right and wrong. Self decides what is good and evil. What makes me feel comfortable decides what is good and evil. What serves my best interests as determined by me alone is the criterion for differentiating between good and evil.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, who is himself a homosexual, says in his book, *The Reformation*: “This is an issue of biblical authority. Despite much well-intentioned theological fancy footwork to the contrary, it is difficult to see the Bible as expressing anything else but disapproval of homosexual activity, let alone having any conception of homosexual identity. The only alternatives are either to cleave to patterns of life and assumptions set out in the Bible, or say that in this, as in much else, the Bible is simply wrong” (681).

So the bottom line, again, is not whether you construct your beliefs and make choices based on a moral authority. ***The bottom line is to which moral authority you give ultimate allegiance: the Creator or the Creature.*** People such as Johnson, Loader, MacCulloch, and the majority of Justices on SCOTUS have chosen the creature.

The decision by the 5 justices who comprised the majority had little if anything to do with the Constitution of the United States. ***It had everything to do with their belief that individual autonomy, i.e., “self”, is the final arbiter when it comes to sexual morality.*** In our society the prevalent presupposition is that all of us are under one moral obligation: ***be yourself***, especially when it comes to sexual identity and practice. Be yourself, whatever your “self” chooses and desires and is pleased to be. Any suppression of strong sexual desires leads to psychological damage. Everyone should simply be left alone to live as freely and in accordance with their chosen sense of “self” as they see fit.

The Court extended this so-called “right” to “self” determination to marriage. In doing so they redefined marriage itself, and they did so based on the idea that each person ought to have the legal right to define marriage however he or she sees fit. I do hope you can see where this will eventually lead. I’m not an alarmist or a prophet, but it doesn’t take either one to recognize what’s coming next. What you must recognize is that ***everyone (except the criminally insane) puts limitations on marriage and sexual behavior.*** At least for now. If “marriage” can be defined in whatever way “self” wants to define it, what if five “selves,” let’s say two men and three women, decide that they ought to have the “freedom” and “dignity” to be married. Who are you to deny them this right, this freedom, the same so-called “dignity” that is afforded to that one man and one woman who are married? And who are you to

deny two other “selves”, in this case a 21-year-old young lady and her 41-year-old biological father, from getting married? On what moral authority do you deny them their freely chosen way to live and love? Why can’t any number of so-called “loving” people form a marriage? Why couldn’t five men marry one another?

And what about two other “selves,” in this case a man and a goat or a woman and a dog? You may think I’m wandering into impossible extremes, but who are you to deny such people their chosen path of sexual expression and love? You don’t think there are people like that in our society? If you don’t, you’re living with your head in the sand. Consider this comment by Gavin Ortlund:

“If people have a ‘right’ to marry whomever they love, should two 15-year-olds be able to get married? Is opposition to cousin marriage a form of genetic and sexual discrimination? These examples are not scare tactics. They are real issues being debated. But the more basic point is this: ***we all define marriage in ways that exclude people, and it is not necessarily the result of discrimination or bigotry to do so***” (Gavin Ortlund).

I cite but one recent example. Immediately following the SCOTUS decision a trio of persons in Montana applied for a wedding license. According to Nathan Collier, who wants to marry a second wife, “It’s about marriage equality.” On what grounds will Mr. Collier be denied his request?

Simply put, the “legal” and “moral reasoning” that gave those five Justices the authority to legalize same-sex marriages can just as easily and eventually will give another Court, somewhere in the future, the authority to legalize ***polygamy*** and ***incest*** and ***bestiality***. After all, what strikes you as repugnant and immoral strikes people who engage in such behavior as loving and liberating. And without a transcendent moral authority, the Bible, to render its verdict on such behavior, “self” will render its verdict. And you know what that verdict is.

What are the Biblical and Moral Non-Negotiables on which We Stand?

(1) Despite the ruling of the Supreme Court, marriage has not changed. Society may suppress the truth in unrighteousness, but it cannot any more change the truth than it can change the color of blood. Marriage is an objective, transcendent truth that can no more be altered than you or I can declare that a circle is a square. Christians should never look to a secular government, or even a religious one, for guidance or for the articulation and application of Christian moral values. We do not depend on any branch of our government for truth or ethics or how we should define marriage.

(2) The fundamental problem isn’t homosexuality or same-sex marriage or transgenderism. The fundamental problem is any and all sexual intercourse outside the bounds of monogamous marriage. The hypocritical tragedy is that some professing Christians who are not married, but are having sex, angrily denounce same-sex marriage. Let me say it with even more explicit language: ***Those committing heterosexual fornication are denouncing those committing homosexual fornication. How dare you!***

And while I’m at it, let me say the same thing to you who are married and are not having sex with someone other than your spouse, but are addicted to pornography. Before you rise up in self-righteous criticism of others, be assured that it is equally hypocritical that you should angrily denounce your Christian brothers and sisters for having heterosexual sex outside of marriage. As one author put it, “if you don’t deal with straight sex outside of marriage, don’t start being inconsistent and speak out against gay sex.” ***The problem in our world isn’t primarily gay sex. It’s all forms of sex outside of marriage.***

(3) The Church must remain faithful to the revealed and authoritative Word of God regardless of how unpopular that may be now and in the days ahead. The Church must remain true to what the Bible says about marriage and human sexuality no matter how many centuries may come and go, no matter how much so-called “culture” may change, no matter how few there eventually are of us who believe the Bible. Presidents and Congresses and Supreme Courts will come and go and we hope and pray that they will all embrace the moral authority of Scripture. But it’s naïve to think they will. It’s naïve to live with the expectation that things will turn for the good. But our allegiance is not ultimately to any human authority or court system, but to God and his revealed Word.

What should be our individual and collective response?

Know this first of all: Panic, pessimism, and apocalyptic rants are out of order for people who believe in the risen, ruling, and soon-returning Christ.

First, we must never forget that when Christianity was birthed in the first century believers in Jesus were in the minority far more so than we are today, and yet it is in that century that the greatest supernatural events occurred and the most effective and wide-spread evangelism took place. ***So don't ever think that the SCOTUS decision or any other legislative act has the power to suppress or diminish the supernatural work of God's Spirit in and through the Church.***

Sadly, some churches have simply given up and given in to the trajectory of our culture. It's over, they say. We must adapt or die. So they figure out a way to claim they are Christians while affirming same-sex activity and marriage. To do this one must eventually cauterize and crucify his own conscience. Other churches circle the wagons and scream in outrage at the wider sectors of society. Neither kind of church will ever have anything meaningful or helpful to say to a lost and dying world.

We, then, should be neither shrill nor silent. You can be right about sexual morality and marriage and be a complete jerk at the same time. ***There's a very thin line between being biblically moral and being a jackass!*** This reminds me of a memorable line from Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Maudie Atkinson is speaking to young Scout and says: "A Bible in the hand of one man can be more dangerous than a whiskey bottle in the hand of another." Think about it.

Second, we should instinctively respond with broken-heartedness and sincere weeping. The Apostle Paul described the self-centered and fleshly orientation of many in the first century and said: "I tell you even with tears, that many glory in their shame" (Phil. 3:18–19). Paul says there were "many" of them in his day (v. 18a). They aren't few and far between. They were everywhere in the ancient world, and they are everywhere today. In that regard, sexual sin hasn't changed much.

Their presence and influence moved Paul to "tears" (v. 18b). It's hard to know what it is precisely that caused him to weep. It may have been the destructive influence these people exerted on the Philippian Christians and other believers whom Paul loved. Or it may be that Paul actually wept for these very individuals who lived in such immoral and destructive ways. Perhaps he wept for their salvation. Perhaps he was heartbroken and devastated with the thought of where their lives would ultimately lead them. So should we be.

Whatever is shameful, they glorify (v. 19c)! The very wicked and perverse behavior that ought to bring conviction and shame, they promote and praise and take pride in! It's one thing to sin. We all do that. But it's another thing when, rather than feeling conviction and pursuing repentance, a person elevates and promotes and flaunts their sin. ***To commit sin is one thing. To rejoice in it and feel pride in one's sin is something altogether different.***

The difference between the Christian and the world isn't that one sins and the other doesn't, although by God's grace and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit Christians should most certainly sin less. The difference, I hope and pray, is that Christians weep over their sins. They don't celebrate them or praise them in public. And they certainly don't institutionalize them as the Supreme Court recently did. But we weep not only for ourselves and our own personal transgressions, but for those of others as well. As the psalmist declared: ***"My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law"*** (Psalm 119:136).

Third, we must learn how to genuinely and authentically and truthfully love those who hate and despise us. That's not just a pious platitude. It must become literal, daily reality.

You and I have yet to experience to any significant degree what Jesus promised to all who follow him. He said it in no uncertain terms that if the world hated him, and it did, it will also hate us (John 15:18-25; 2 Tim. 3:12). If the world loves us it isn't because we are beautiful or bright but because we have started to conform to its ways and look more and more like it does.

So what do we do? We do not revile when reviled, but entrust ourselves to God (1 Peter 2:21-25). We bless those who persecute us (Rom. 12:14). And we pray for and truly love our enemies (Matt. 5:44).

It is of utmost importance that the people who support the SCOTUS decision and especially people who are active participants in the LGBT movement see and hear and feel Christ in us. They must see, hear, and feel the truth of God's Word in and through us but in a way that also recognizes they are human beings created in God's image and thus deserving of the utmost respect and dignity that any and all human beings should be shown.

It sounds so simple, but the Bible is clear about our response. We are to love the Lord our God and have no other alleged "gods" before him (Exod. 20:2-3). He must be supreme in our affections. And we are love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). The problem is that we often feel a tension between the two. To love God means that we speak his revealed truth as clearly as we can, and on occasion this makes other people feel as if they aren't being loved. When the truth of God conflicts with what "self" believes and wants, some are tempted to water down or rephrase or diminish the force of God's truth.

The Bible says that ***love is not the same as unconditional affirmation.*** Love is not making a choice or believing something on the grounds that it makes someone feel good about themselves. Love is not speaking or acting in a way that people are never challenged about the truth or falsity of what they believe. We mistakenly think that if someone is ever made to feel uncomfortable, we have not loved them. We mistakenly think that if someone's personal preferences and opinions are not endorsed and encouraged without qualification, we have not loved them. We mistakenly think that if our statement of truth causes people to experience sadness and sorrow, we have not loved them. Consider Jesus and his interaction with the rich young ruler of Mark 10.

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mark 10:18-22).

I simply want to draw your attention to a remarkable statement in v. 21. There it is said that ***Jesus "loved him."*** These are not mere feelings of pity. The heart of our Lord is moved with deep affection and he wants this man to see the truth! That Jesus is said to have loved him indicates the ruler was not a hypocrite, or even arrogant in his response. Naïve and uninformed, yes, but not pompous and self-righteous.

Consider our view of "love" today: if you love someone be certain that you don't offend them; don't be insensitive by challenging their false beliefs; avoid painful topics; don't say or do anything that might be upsetting. Above all else, be tolerant!

Jesus, on the other hand, ***precisely because he loves this young man and cares deeply about his eternal destiny,*** uses the Law as a surgical knife and cuts deeply and painfully into his soul to expose his most fundamental and debilitating problem: covetousness and greed!

Our Lord's comments left this man "disheartened" and "sorrowful". Yet, would anyone doubt that Jesus had this man's highest and best and eternal interests most in mind? Would anyone doubt that Jesus genuinely loved him? My point is this: ***when you have made someone sad it doesn't mean you haven't loved them. They may feel you haven't. But having the courage to tell someone that their lifestyle puts their soul in danger of eternal condemnation is not a failure to love. It may well be the most loving thing you can do.*** The problem is that often, instead of "speaking the truth in love," Christians angrily and self-righteously and in a profoundly unloving and unkind manner make known the truth. If you are ever in a position to communicate with a person in an active homosexual relationship, and you feel led to direct them to what Scripture says about the eternal consequences of their lifestyle, may your words and the tone of your voice be bathed in tears. Not artificial tears or feigned concern, but Christ-like, heart-felt, loving tears.

Why is Monogamous, Heterosexual Marriage so Important to Evangelical Christians?

Why do we who identify as conservative evangelicals put so much emphasis on the importance of heterosexual monogamy as the only morally acceptable option? Two reasons may be cited. Of course, I could mention historical,

social, and cultural arguments, even psychological arguments for the benefits and blessings of heterosexual marriage. But let me mention two biblical arguments.

First, this is God's will for *all* mankind! Moses said it clearly: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). In a world where the primary human relationship was of a child and his parents, this was a stunning statement. We are being told that nothing trumps the one-flesh relationship between a man and his wife. A person's deepest and most abiding loyalty is to his/her spouse.

A man is to "hold fast" or "cleave" to his wife. I love how my friend Ray Ortlund put it: "A man, in marrying," said Ray, "enfolds his wife into his heart. He rejoices to identify with her: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (verse 23). At every level of his being, he becomes wholeheartedly devoted to her, as to no other."

And the two shall become "one flesh." Says Ortlund, "It means, one mortal life fully shared. Two selfish me's start learning to think like one unified us, sharing one everything: one life, one reputation, one bed, one suffering, one budget, one family, one mission, and so forth. No barriers. No hiding. No aloofness. Now total openness with total sharing and total solidarity, until death parts them."

To reinforce this truth Jesus declared that it was God who has joined or united them in this way (Matt. 19:6). "What we see then, is that marriage is not a product of human social evolution; marriage came down from God. And he defined it for us. He has the right to. It belongs to him" (Ortlund).

When the Apostle Paul picks up on this in Ephesians 5 he states it with even greater clarity: "We are members of his [Christ's] body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Ephesians 5:30-31). Notice his logic. "We are members of Christ's body. He loved us. He chose us. He gave himself up for us. He will present us someday in splendor. We are united with Christ now and forever. Therefore, our union with Christ is the reason why, a man and woman get married and live united as 'one flesh.' *Human marriages are miniature social platforms on which the gospel is to be displayed. . . . Marriage is a gospel issue.* That is why clarity about its definition matters to Christians. If we depart from, or fail to stand up for, the biblical view of marriage, we are taking a step away from the gospel itself. The whole Bible is the story of the marital love of God. Our whole lives are that story, if we have eyes to see" (Ray Ortlund).

By the way, if this sounds as if a person who is now single and perhaps may remain single forever cannot be a whole person or cannot embody and express the gospel as much as a married person, you have not heard the full witness of Scripture. This calls for a special message on what it means to be single and celibate in the local church. I hope to preach that message very soon.

Should I ever attend a so-called Same-Sex Wedding?

In the first place, *there is no such thing as a "gay wedding"*. I'm not saying that gay people aren't in fact hosting a ceremony in which they formally commit themselves one to another. I'm simply saying that what they are not doing is getting married. The reason is that marriage, on its biblical definition, is the lifelong covenantal commitment of a man and a woman. No commitment, no covenant, no vow or pledge or promise or notarized piece of paper that involves two people of the same gender qualifies as a "marriage". Call it a civil ceremony or whatever you will. But it's not a marriage.

But didn't Jesus mingle with notorious sinners and share a meal with prostitutes and tax-collectors? Yes, but we must remember that whereas Jesus loved and extended mercy to sexual sinners he did not at any time attend a ritual that celebrated immorality. I don't believe Jesus would ever have attended such an event unless his purpose was to call people to repentance. I suspect that participants at such a so-called wedding would prefer that I not be present, since I would be openly and visibly weeping in broken heartedness at a ceremony that solemnizes behavior that puts a loved one at risk of not inheriting God's kingdom.