

Reconciliation in Israel/Palestine A Theological Reflection on the Recent United States Supreme Court Ruling on Same-Sex Marriage and Its Impact on Religious Liberty

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The Verdict:

On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court voted 5-4 to hand-down its final verdict in the Scotus case saying that the US Constitution guarantees the right to same-sex marriage in the whole country. Prior to this decision, there were 13 out of the 50 states, mostly southern states, also known as the “bible belt of America”. They are known to be more conservative in their social and family values and “fundamentalist” in their position and understanding of the scriptures compared to the rest of the country. They were the last hold out for traditional marriages.

This decision of the highest court of the land was a turning point in the life of the nation which prides in having a Judeo-Christian ethic in her foundation and much of her history, despite its legacy of slavery and racism.

Before The Verdict:

Earlier this June, 2015, a number of Christian pastors and evangelical leaders converged in Washington DC and crafted a document opposing same sex marriage. These pastors signed their own names on this document, which appeared in the Washington Post as a paid advertisement, which signified that they are willing to disobey the high court on this matter, and ready to go to jail and suffer for their faith, should the Supreme Court decides in favor of redefining the institution of marriage as we know it then. They took inspiration in the examples of the Apostles in Acts 5 when confronted by the religious authorities to stop preaching about Jesus Christ, instead they declared that they “rather obey God than men!”

In the past months and years, there were cases wherein Christians, both lay and clergy, were charged and found guilty of discriminating same-sex couples. These include florists, photographers, bakery owners, etc., who when approached and demanded by the same-sex couples the commercial services that their businesses offer for weddings declined to do so. They were sued and later found guilty of violating the civil rights of these same sex couples. Some pastors who were approached by same sex couples to officiate their wedding and refused to do so were also accused and some sued for discrimination. In some states now, there have been initiatives from legislators to enact a Pastor Protection Law, for instance in Kansas, that laws has just been signed by its Governor into law.

Most of them, if not all, refused on the ground that it violated their conscience and religious freedom. As their cases went to trial, most of them lost and were required to pay a hefty amount for various damages the courts granted to these same sex couples who claimed that they were discriminated and their human and civil rights were violated because of their gender preferences.

After the Verdict/Responses...

Now, that the same-sex marriage equality rights are legal and protected under the Constitution by virtue of the verdict or ruling by the Supreme Court, many in the evangelical communities are in a quandary on how to respond to this new reality. Their response is mostly categorized by the group they represent:

Many *conservative groups* are more defiant and are willing to oppose it, even suffer (i.e., serving prison terms or paying hefty fines, etc.) for their biblical convictions. Representatives of this camp include: Franklin Graham, presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, and other many well-known evangelical personalities.

The more *moderate groups* are taking a “live and let live” stance which means letting the LGBT community have what they wanted and to let them do their own thing. They do not want to interfere with their desire to get married to their respective same-sex partners and have access to all the benefits that goes with it.

The *liberal groups* are in full support of the LGBT’s agenda, which include more than marriage equality. They support their fight for changes in the federal and state laws with regards to domestic couples benefits, inheritance, adoption, immigration etc. which in many ways conflict with the interests of the evangelicals and conservative groups.

This new reality is a challenge to the people of God in America. Other dissenters may vary on their response to this new reality. God forbid that there are those who would resort to violence or extreme measures like that in the case of the abortion debate where extreme pro-life advocates assassinated abortionists or plotted bombs in abortion clinics. Others will engage in serious debates in public forums by opposing same sex marriages and affirming traditional marriages, in a more civil manner while others will debate in a more confrontational manner and engage in screaming matches. Many other Christians will be more passive and evasive of the issue, and will take the path of least resistance.

The Irony

It is tragic to observe that gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people are the ones desiring and actually pursuing marriages while the heterosexual folks in great number are avoiding marriages and being content in their cohabitations in fear of being divorced and/or avoiding personal responsibilities yet wanting of the comforts and privileges of a married life without going through with the legalities of it.

Challenges/Opportunities

Where do we go from here? I think we can learn from the experiences of believers from other western countries who have gone through the legalization of same sex marriages.

As an evangelical with this new reality in America, I believe that this is the opportune time for us to stand up to what we believe from the Scriptures as to God’s good design for marriage. We must stand up for biblical fidelity on this issue even if that will mean being persecuted for our faith. We must model our marriages as God had willed it to be since creation. We must be witnesses and reach out to the LGBT community with the love of Christ through service and acts of mercy towards them and consider ourselves as aliens in this new American society. We must shine the light of Jesus in this darkened world. (Matt. 5:17)

In the process, we must take the call of the Apostle Peter “to be ready to make a defense of the hope that is in us yet do it with gentleness”. (1 Peter 2)

Unfortunately, the polygamists and polymorists are pushing with their own agenda of having an “open marriages” and their lifestyles be legalized and are using the same arguments that the LGBT community in their fight for legalization and recognition which was granted by the US Supreme Court in the Scotus case. As to how this legal fight will shape up only time will tell.

Again, as the people of God we take heart that no matter how this world will be, we are eventually strangers in this world and we know who holds the future. And we know how human history will come to its conclusion. So for that reason, we can rejoice and be glad. But meantime, we engaged the world with the good news of the kingdom. Amen.