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Why the church should neither cave nor panic about the decision on gay marriage

By **Russell Moore** June 26

This opinion piece is by Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

As I write this, the Supreme Court has handed down what will be the “Roe v. Wade” of marriage, redefining marriage in all 50 states. This is a sober moment, and I am a conscientious dissenter from this ruling. The Court now has disregarded thousands of years of definition of the most foundational unit of society, and the cultural changes here will be broad and deep. So how should the church respond?

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, I believe, 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.

[\[Here are the key excerpts on religious liberty from the Supreme Court’s decision on gay marriage\]](#)

The church will need in the years ahead to articulate what we believe about marriage; we cannot 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 (Eph. 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 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.

[\[Why the Supreme Court decision on gay marriage represents a new era for evangelicals\]](#)

Let's also recognize that if we're right about marriage, and I believe we are, 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). This will not do so, because sexual complementarity is not ancillary to marriage. 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.

[\[After Supreme Court ruling, religious groups worry next shoe will drop\]](#)

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. Let's joyfully march to Zion.

The witness to marriage will be, like the pro-life movement, 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.

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