

On Wednesday or Thursday of last week, July first or second, I received an email from R.D. Fish editor of the Morgan County Press. It was sent to several of the clergy in the city of Stover directly. In it he asked the following questions:

Would you like to share any reactions to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges re gay marriage?

Where do you stand on this as a Christian, a minister and a citizen?

How will this affect your church's policy and practice?

What issues do you see coming out of this for our community?

[Begin] My reaction was profound and shocking disappointment. I can't say I was surprised, but when it came down I sat stunned. The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on this issue was highly anticipated by all sides on this case. And it wasn't hard to predict the outcome.

It is an issue that is at the same time complex and simple. It is complex because our DNA and mission as Christ followers is first to love, and extend grace to ALL. We are commanded by our Lord to extend the same grace to everyone, that we ourselves have received. And in the Lord's Prayer we state that we will forgive as we've been forgiven. We must be gracious, merciful loving people, at all times, and at all places. We need to be a haven for all the broken down "sinners" whoever we may be, a sanctuary for the lost and struggling. But at the same time stand up for the truth and righteousness. We cannot compromise, or allow compromise to slip into our congregations. And we have the right to govern our assemblies accordingly. But we also pray, "lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil." That is why it is complex. And we have not always handled this well. While that is no excuse, it is a challenge we must continually strive to achieve.

The issue is simple in that while there are many opinions, by experts and the average citizen on each side, there is really only one argument that matters from my perspective as a pastor. What does God say?

That question matters a great deal to me. And I don't take it for granted. It not my job to simply express my personal opinions from the pulpit, on any issue. It is critical that I approach the texts and declare what God has said with all the skills I have at my disposal. I have been privileged to receive a certain amount of education, and training in biblical studies, so I can go into the original languages to a degree myself, and rely on the scholarship of others where my training stops. This and other complex issues have caused me to be a continual student of the Word, even with 28 years and six churches worth of ministry under my belt.

Based on that study, my conclusion is that the modern voices that say God approves and exalts same sex relations are flat wrong. This is not a difficult conclusion to make. The plain reading of passages is clear. The scholarship on this is immense. It is a massive undertaking to think that a few scholars in the last five to ten years, can overturn millenia of sound interpretation.

The next question is whether this applies today. Does the Bible's ancient teachings on this apply to today? Absolutely. This question is not new. These and other lifestyles revealed during the Roman era are well recorded.

As a congregation, we are taking this very seriously, and while the proponents tell us that our religious liberties will not be affected, I am not convinced in the least. According to my reading, I am not alone in this. Nearly everyone in evangelical church leadership circles are very concerned. The loss of tax exempt status is what is heard as the first thing to go. Our congregation has already taken a stand on this issue six years ago, and took the bold stance to depart from the ELCA, the largest Lutheran

denomination who, as everyone knows, is supportive of last week's ruling. They joined the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, a small primarily mid western conservative body. We are also rewriting our marriage policy to reflect our positions. Decisions on this are made jointly by council and pastor.

The issues for our community are really only conjecture. But two things come to mind. First churches will, and do, disagree on these things. So people who hold to the contrasting positions will attend the churches who teach their views. Second, the public school will very likely have to reflect the government's positions. I would expect to see curriculum's in short order reflecting the law of the land on the new marriage ruling, as well as shortly the non discrimination language and rules for public owned spaces mandated by the force of law.

This is not about judging, or even who is a sinner. But it is about what is sin. We are all equally guilty before a holy God. No one can or should point a finger at another. But we all must recognize our corporate and individual guilt and repent of our sin. Repentance is turning. In the Holy Scripture, God has put together a societal order of the family. Christian marriage, is a picture of the Gospel itself. This was literally woven together in Genesis, and ends with the spiritual Bride of Christ in the Revelation.

This cannot be anything but revolutionary.

Pastor Tom Tuura Christ Lutheran Church, Stover Missouri