

SERMON

Same Sex Marriage and the Church

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...by the power vested in me by the Constitution of the United States of America, I now pronounce you...life partners

"We believe that marriage is a union between one man and woman, we also believe in the Due Process clause of the Constitution of the United States of America that safeguards against the arbitrary denial of life, liberty and property for all people," states the Supreme Court of the United States of America, in a landmark decision, *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Same-sex unions are protected by the constitution.

This landmark 2015 decree by the highest court of the land is in direct opposition to the historical church position on marriage between a man and woman. The court decision however, allows the traditional church to remain firm in her longstanding biblical beliefs yet be cognizant that same sex unions are legal in the eyes of the law of the land. Many individuals feel that the world is coming to an end. They fear that church pastors and trustees will be charged with defamation and discrimination. This may happen, you cannot prevent a person from suing you, however, the law at the present time tends to adhere to the "separation of church and state," principle. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote the majority opinion for the court. The following excerpts are attributed to him:

1. Marriage is sacred. Since the dawn of history marriage transformed strangers into relatives, binding families.
2. There is a long tradition of opposite sex marriages.
3. The petitioners seek not to devalue marriage but to have the privileges and responsibility and real commitment.
4. The definition of marriage has evolved over time. At one time marriages were arranged, a voluntary contract and women rights were inferior to their husbands.
5. Same sex intimacy was a crime.
6. Gay individuals were discriminated against in employment, government jobs, and immigration laws.
7. Homosexuality was considered an illness.

The court listed four principles under the constitution that apply with equal force to the same sex couples as heterosexual couples:

1. Individuals have the right to personal choice.

2. Marriage supports a two-person union that is older than the Bill of Rights. It is a coming together for better or for worse. Same sex couples should have the security as opposite sex.
3. It safeguards children and families due process. 100,000 children are raised by same sex couples. Legally married same sex couples children can no longer feel their families are less than other families, which causes humiliation and harm.
4. Marriage is part of the social order. Material benefits, symbolic recognition, taxation, inheritance, property rights, hospital access, medical decision making.

The author of the court's opinion also has a message for the church, "Many who deemed same sex marriage to be wrong, reach conclusions based on decent and honorable religious or philosophical premises, however when sincere personal opposition become law and public policy, the consequence is to put the state on an exclusion stigmatizes those who own liberty is then denied." The court also states "The First Amendment Rights ensure religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach precepts of their faith and those who oppose for other reasons." The law does not require the church to agree or minimize her beliefs or practices. In theory the church remains the church. It would be nice if this was the case, but the fact is the church is now in the spotlight, and the court of public opinion will be watching the "churches," every move.

The medical community has been proactive in addressing the socio-medicinal concerns of gay population. They saw a need several years ago to adopt a code of understanding. A publication by The Kaiser Permanente National Diversity Council, titled, A Provider's Handbook on Culturally Competent Care states, "Sexual orientation refers to the emotional and physical attraction to others of a particular sex, whether that is a different sex, as in heterosexuality, or same sex, as in homosexuality. The term "sexual preference" is inappropriate since it implies that sexual orientation is a behavioral choice rather than an intrinsic personal characteristic." This document was developed so that medical care providers would respect the personhood of all individuals that seek medical care. It should also be noted that the medical community believes that sexual orientation, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, (LGBTQ) tend not to be choice but an inward orientation or formation.

I was in a meeting recently and I suggested it may not be accurate to categorize the entire LGBTQ population as exclusively a behavioral choice way of life. According to the Kaiser document previously quoted, "Intersexuality features congenital variation of the reproductive and sexual system. Intersex people are born with "sex chromosomes," external genitalia, and/or internal reproductive systems that are not considered exclusively male or female." If that is true, how can a person decide their physical accessories/necessities? Conservative estimates suggest that one in 2000 newborn are found to have ambiguous external genitalia, and that 100 to 200 pediatric surgical sexual reassignments are performed in the U.S. annually." The fact is all mortals are tainted at conception with various manifestations of our inherited sinful nature. In a nutshell, sin has tarnished the entire human race. The LGBTQ community is tainted and the Un-LGBTQ community (also known as heterosexual community) is also tainted. We cannot blame God. We blame sin and if the truth be told, none of us deserve his loving tender mercy.

The universal church is no stranger to the gay population. Congregations have known for years that gay individuals have served in their churches. Gay preachers, priest, musicians, choir directors and others have played major roles in our churches, for better or for worst, for decades. If we removed all gay people from the church, many ministries, in the eyes of the people would suffer a staggering loss. If we stopped singing songs written by gay people our repertoire would be minuscule and bland.

The churches unspoken position has been similar to the military stance at one point and time in history, "Don't ask, don't tell." Congregations would suspect that certain individuals were gay, however they tended to look beyond their sexual orientation and love, respect and admire the individual. Now that gay couples want the same rights and privileges of heterosexual couples, a loving monogamous relationship with one partner, the church immediately gets a serious case of indigestion and cannot stomach the idea. The subtle message of the church to the gay population is, "You are welcome as long as you live in the closet, so to speak, you can continue to have one partner, multiple partners or one night stands. However, if you want to get married and "settle down," with one partner you should find another church to attend.

Recently I observed a discussion among pastors centered on the question, "what to do if a child of a gay couple wants to join your church?" A better way to ask this question would be, if a child of a same sex couple wanted to give her/his life to Christ and join the congregation you pastor, what would you do? This scenario can be further personalized. Suppose your child or grandchild belongs to a same sex marriage, and the child says to you, "Papaw I want to give my life to the Lord and I want to serve in your church." Are you and the church, willing to cast the children aside and disesteem the words of Jesus in *Matt 19:14*, "But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (KJV) because of their parents? Imagine the emotional toll on the child. I am not good enough to accept Jesus and be baptized and serve in the church because I have two moms or dads? We have children of divorced parents, un-married parents, and common-law parents. We accept them and do not ban their parents from church participation or admission. If anyone becomes convicted by the message preached, then praise God.

The only sexual relationship that is authentically recognized in the Bible is a matrimony heterosexual one. All homosexual relations constitute sexual perversion and are subject to God's judgement. (Gen. 2:21-24, Matt. 19:4-6: Bible Knowledge Commentary O.T.)

If one accepts a literal reading of scripture, it is clear that the original intent of emotional/sexual intimacy was to be heterosexual. The Apostle Paul specifically references God's disapproval with homosexual sexual intimacy. Later interpreters or re-interpreters of the afore-mentioned passage have surmised that Paul did not mean what he said, or present day readers do not understand what he really meant, or Paul had some latent sexual issues that manifested itself in homophobic rhetoric. However, there is no concrete evidence to validate these opinions.

The book of Romans is a powerful doctrinal piece, it interprets Habakkuk 2:4, *the just shall live by faith*. The following passage provides insight into the antithesis of a life of faith.

22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. 28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to

retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind; to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:22-32)

Verse 22 makes it clear that the root of the problem with the people, whom God abandoned, was their entrenchment with idol worship. Craig Kenner in his commentary on the book of Romans said, "Pagan gods acted immorally and those that follow the pagan gods tended to act the same way. These idol worshippers were abandoned by God to their degrading lust and at the top of the list were individuals who had sexual relations with people of the same sex. God let them loose to fall further in degradation. They rejected God's invisible qualities, they became immersed in creature worship rather than creator worship and God refuse to deliver them, He let them go. Paul said, "they are worthy of death."

Kenner also states, "Paul argues that distorting one's view about God's character perverts one's sexual treatment of other people; ancient Jewish people recognized that both idolatry and sexual immorality characterized the Gentiles. Greek men were commonly bisexual; not only was homosexual behavior approved (some writers, like speakers in Plato's Symposium, preferred it to heterosexual behavior), but elements of the culture socialized boys in this direction. Men and women were segregated growing up, and male bonds became close. Apparently due to a deficiency in the number of women (which many attribute to female infanticide), marriages were often made between thirty-year-old men and fourteen-year-old women, whom the men saw as children. Men had access to only three forms of sexual release until such late marriages: slaves, prostitutes and other men. (Introducing boys to homoerotic pleasure was a favorite pastime of Greek men in this period.)" (IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.).

L.E. Campbell, Pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church in Riverside, CA said, "If God did not intervene on our behalf we would not come to God." We are **not** born with a predisposition to worship or serve God. We are sinners and if God did not extend his mercy to those who are chosen we would be lost, for we deserve death. Romans the ninth chapter informs us that God loved (choose) Jacob but hated (rejected) Esau. God is not unfair, as the scripture says, "I'll (God) will have mercy on whomever I choose to have mercy." *Romans 9:15*. Augustine said, "God's mercy is given to those who do not deserve it, his hardening affects those who have already by their sin deserved condemnation." Thank God for those of us who are saved because of his unmerited favor.

It should be carefully noted that a child of God is not one that does not sin, we all sin. However, a child of God is one who does not practice a life of sin. *1 John 3:9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he/she has been born of God.*

If your name/ or character is synonymous with greed, gossip, slander, rudeness, pride, disobedient to parents, disloyal, whoremonger, fornicator etc. you might want to revisit your divine transformation experience. Homosexuality tends to be one of the most severe sins because it disrupts God's social order and the natural scheme of things. It does not take a

Rhodes Scholar to conclude that male and female; emotionally and physically go together like, "soup and sandwich." Sin has made the compatibility a challenge, but God's intent does not change.

Jerry Young, President of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., stated in regards to the gay population, "The world should not show people more love than the church." I agree. *John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

I do not believe this command requires us to love only heterosexuals, but everybody, all of God's creation, LGBTQ included. The church is a hospital; we are open for patients not clients. We need more sick people. The church has too many people who think there are well but on their way to hell. When I go to the hospital I do not need to be reminded over and over again why I am sick. What I need to know is how can I get better, how can my body be cured? Teach me about that woman who had an issue of blood and touched the hem of His garment and she was made whole. Teach me about the ten lepers that were healed and one came back to Jesus and said, "Thank you." Teach me that by Jesus stripes I am spiritually healed.

The word of God has a way of working on people like nothing else can. As a pastor I do not have to compromise my beliefs. I will not perform same-sex marriages, I do not think Jesus would do such a thing, but I will minister to couples. Not only same-sex couples persons, I will continue to minister to gossips, preacher haters, liars, cheats, shacking couples, malicious persons, felons, should be felons, adulterers, fornicators in hope that God will show mercy on them as he has shown mercy on me.

We understand that we have all types of sinners in our churches, but our unique problem to date is how do we respond to same sex couples who desire to join the congregational church? This situation requires much pray and guidance by God. Years of zero-tolerance of same-sex marriages has been rooted in our minds. Denominational meetings will follow as the church wrestles with a statement on the acceptance or rejection of same sex marriages. I have faith that through prayer, God will order our steps as we proceed in this uncharted territory.

The Bible admonishes the children of God to pray without ceasing. Pray one for another. Paul says in Romans those that **abandoned** God he *abandons* them. As long as sinner comes to church to hear the word of God I am foolish enough to believe there is still hope. I am not God it not my job to give up on anybody, not the churches God to give up on anybody. My friend Albertina Walker sang the song, "*Please be patient with me, God is not through with me yet, because when God gets through with me I shall come forth as pure gold.*"

I am going to keep on preaching, because the power of the word of the living God has power. The church should be a place of love and offer Christ love to everybody. It is not my job to do the separating. *Matt 13:29-30 "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."*

Preach Jesus the crucified one. Somebody had to preach to me, somebody had to pray for me, I like what the songwriter said, "*I was sinking deep in sin far from the blissful shore, very deeply stained within sinking to rise no more, but the master of the sea heard my disparaging cry, from the waters lifted me, now safe am I. Love lifted me.....*"

Dr. W. Edward Jenkins



Dr. W. Edward Jenkins received his B.A. in Sociology from the University of California, Riverside. He holds a Masters of Theology & Biblical Studies and a Doctorate degree of Ministry from Fuller Theology Seminary in Pasadena, CA. A longstanding educator, Dr. Jenkins taught Government/Law for the Riverside Unified School District and received his Lifetime Secondary Teaching Credential. Dr. Jenkins was the Coordinator of the Drug & Alcohol Intervention Program, as well as the Work Experience Program for the Riverside School District. Dr. Jenkins has also taught Biblical Greek at the California State Convention. In the late 80s, Dr. Jenkins pastored the Bibleway Baptist Church of Woodcrest, CA. He is currently the Pastor of Victory Baptist Church of Los Angeles, a position that he has held for 20 years. Dr. Jenkins is a board member of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. and a faculty member of the National Congress of Christian Education. In addition to his work in the National Baptist Convention, Inc., he has held the positions of Vice-Moderator and Dean of the Ministers' Conference in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and he is presently the Moderator of the LADA. Dr. Jenkins is married to Kimberley and they have one son, Jahi.

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