

Youth Culture Lesson
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I Now Pronounce You...

The Supreme Court, Gay Marriage and You
By Paul Asay

What Happened:

On June 26, the Supreme Court essentially handed down two decisions that greatly impact the debate regarding same-sex marriage in the United States.

The nine-judge court decided by a slim 5-4 majority that same-sex married couples were entitled to federal benefits. The majority opinion declared the federal Defense of Marriage Act (passed in 1996) violated the Fifth Amendment, though the dissenting judges and some observers find the legal rationale for the ruling unclear.

The second issue before the court was California's Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in the state. The proposition was overturned in a lower court, and the Supreme Court decided it could not vote on the case itself because of some technical issues. The decision allowed the lower court's ruling to stand, thus spelling the end of Prop 8.

The rulings left gay and lesbian couples, along with those who support marriage equality, understandably elated. Those who've campaigned for traditional marriage saw the decision as a setback.

Yet the debate goes on: While the non-decision made California the 13th state to allow same-sex marriages, the Supreme Court did not decide what to do with the 35 states that formally have defined marriage as just between a man and a woman. The issues are often more difficult than some would like to think. As Justice Antonin Scalia said in his dissent, "In the majority's telling, this story is black-and-white: Hate your neighbor or come along with us. The truth is more complicated."

Talk About It:

The truth *is* more complicated for most Christian churches in America. It has been a hotly contested issue—and how Christians grapple with gay rights is a question that'll have far-reaching consequences for the church and how the church is viewed.

The Bible has a number of passages that explicitly seem to call homosexual behavior sinful. The Catholic Church and most evangelical churches agree, and together those two groups make up the majority of American Christians. Other mainline denominations—Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc.—have wrestled with this issue for decades now. Some denominations have split regarding the issue.

If a given church isn't conflicted, some *in* the church may be. Nearly half of all evangelical youth (44%) believe same-sex marriage should be legalized, compared to less

than 20 percent of older evangelicals. Whatever you think about gay marriage, there's probably someone in the room who disagrees with you.

They disagree in part because acceptance of gay marriage has grown so quickly, many who might support traditional marriage now worry they'll be viewed as prejudiced or homophobic—making it more uncomfortable to speak up and voice those views. The reverse can be true of same-sex marriage advocates in conservative communities.

Do you know what your church thinks of gay marriage? Do you agree with your church's stance? Why or why not?

Do you have gay friends? If so, have you talked about the issue of same-sex marriage? If you disagree, have you been able to talk about the issue and still be friends? In what way do you think is best to talk about these big, difficult issues?

Are there ways of talking about big topics such as this without needlessly making people mad? Do you think Christians have done a good job of talking about this issue? Are there things we could do better?

What the Bible Says:

“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:6-9).

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:14-15).

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

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