

# The Road Ahead

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*Various passages*

June 30, 2013

## Introduction:

*Monopoly* is one of those games that can be great fun while you are winning but dreadfully tedious to play if you're losing. If you own Park Place and Boardwalk and a complete set of a few of the other high-value properties on the board, you begin to build houses and hotels and await the large sums of money that will be paid to you when your unlucky opponent lands on your properties. Such fun! But when your best location is Baltic Ave or those other low-value properties between Go and Jail, no matter how many houses you built, no matter how many "Get Out of Jail Free" cards you possess, you are going to lose. And once you realize your fate is sealed, that the law of averages means eventual bankruptcy because you will inevitably land on your opponent's hotel-enriched Boardwalk, playing the game is like dying a long, slow, painful death. Within the first hour of playing *Monopoly*, you know if you're going to lose and all you can do is keep rolling the dice and passing the hours until finally, mercifully, your money is gone, your properties mortgaged, and you can swear never to play such a prolonged, torturous board game ever again.

I think what we've been experiencing recently in regard to the acceptance of gay marriage in our culture is akin to those games of *Monopoly*: eventually you look at where all the pieces are on the board and realize you aren't going to win. The small victories, liking pulling the "Bank error in your favor, collect \$200" card, aren't enough to halt the tide. The game is over; you've lost, although it may take a few more rounds of playing before the near-certain future become a present reality.

After the Supreme Court rulings this week, I think it is safe to say that we've lost the game. We still need to play it out and it will continue to be played out in individual states and in the courts for years to come, but I think at this point the handwriting on the wall is legible. It is highly unlikely that any kind of constitutional amendment or further Supreme Court ruling will overturn the right of each state to sanction same-sex marriage. If anything, should a case come before the Supreme Court that would demand a ruling on the constitutionality of same-sex marriage, given the current make-up of the Court and the prevailing winds of public and legal opinion, it would be difficult to imagine anything other than same-sex marriage being enshrined into federal law. It is only a matter of time before gay marriage is made law in most if not all states. It's no longer a question of *if* it will happen, only *when* and how soon.

In light of this, I want to take a short break from our preaching series in Matthew and give our attention to this question that has been at the forefront of the news this week and has been a concern for Christians and many others for some time. I want to consider this issue of gay marriage from three perspectives this morning: first, how we got to where we are; second, where we are right now, and third, where do we go from here. So to begin I want us to talk about the past a bit and consider how we got this place culturally where the notion of gay marriage could even be seriously considered, much less promoted and celebrated. So my first point this morning concerns...

## A. What got us here

Let me begin with a little illustration. Back when I was living in Missouri we needed to reseed our lawn. So we nuked the old grass, tilled the ground, fertilized it, and planted new grass seed. But let's say for a moment we didn't plant any seed. Say we simply allowed the yard to remain as freshly tilled earth and let the rain and sunlight have at it. What would happen? Our yard would not remain dirt for long, would it? Weeds would eventually show up. Given the conditions, it would be no surprise that weeds would spout and grow. So it is with our current situation: the cultural soil has been ready for the acceptance of gay marriage for some time now. It was only a matter of time before the notion of gay marriage eventually took root and began to blossom. We should not be surprised by the acceptance of gay marriage because the conditions were ripe for it; it is the natural result of what many of us already believed about sex, marriage, love, and liberty. We've already sown the seeds and fertilized the yard through our shared cultural norms; we're only now experiencing the inevitable fruit of those values.

So at the risk of being reductionistic, I want to begin by briefly identifying a few of the cultural streams that have contributed to the rising river of acceptance of gay marriage. While not any one of these factors alone has brought us to this place, and no doubt those far wiser than I can point to additional contributing factors, allow me to highlight seven I believe are significant.

The first is **egalitarianism**, which is the notion of total equality between the sexes. It's the idea that men and women are equal in every respect and therefore are functionally interchangeable. Now there are good things about egalitarianism: we no longer treat women as second-class citizens: women can vote, receive equal pay for equal work, and so on. But in correcting the errors of patriarchy, the pendulum has swung so far in the opposite direction such that we've obliterated any notion of differences between the sexes whatsoever. As a result, we've lost the sense of the complementary nature of the sexes: that men and women are equal but different; there is something unique about manhood that is unlike womanhood and both are necessary and complement the other, especially in marriage and in the raising of children.

But once we buy into the egalitarian understanding that men and women are essentially undifferentiated and interchangeable, then why should we predicate marriage upon gender differences? If there is nothing special about a man and a woman that is not equally true of two men or two women, then why object to such an arrangement in a marriage or as adoptive parents?

The second factor is our sense of **individualistic freedom**. We champion the right of an individual to choose: free to choose the kind of car we drive, the kind of job we want, and the kind of person we wish to marry, apart from any interference. Thus when it seems the government is needlessly interfering with our freedom to choose, we resist. But the flip side of this is if we have not freely chosen something, then we believe we're not to be condemned for it. So for example, we do not blame a man for the color of his skin: he did not choose it; therefore it is not wrong. So it is reasoned that if sexual

orientation is not freely chosen, then one must not be blamed for it. After all, they made no choice in the matter. Because we've bought into our culture's view of individualistic freedom of choice, we react strongly against any notion that homosexual orientation is somehow biologically or genetically conditioned. We insist on invoking environmental explanations for homosexual behavior because we intuitively assume that if a person is indeed "born that way" then the argument is lost.

Closely related to this is our **theological** understanding of God. If a person did not choose his sexual orientation, then God must have, and who are we to argue with God? If God made me this way, we reason, then that must be good and acceptable to him. After all, is not the God we teach about in many of our churches today one who exists to make us happy, so we might be healthy and wealthy and enjoy our best life now? If so, then why would God want me to deny my natural desires he gave me, desires which make me happy to fulfill and miserable to deny? Of course such thinking reveals a deep misunderstanding of the nature of sin and the purposes of God for humanity, but it rings so true in our hearts as Americans who have grown up with this truncated theology of God as our cosmic genie that we can't possibly imagine him demanding of us any kind of repentance or self-denial whatsoever.

The fourth cultural factor that has fed into the rapid acceptance of gay marriage is the understanding of **marriage as personal fulfillment**. We no longer view marriage as a lifelong union necessary for the well-being of one's spouse, one's children, and society at large. Marriage is now simply an emotional commitment made to someone whom you love. It exists for you and for your happiness, and should you no longer be happy in your marriage and fall out of love, then we believe the marriage can and should end since the whole basis for marriage – emotional feelings of love and personal fulfillment – no longer exist. But then if so, if marriage is only an emotional comment between people in love, why should it be limited to only a man and a woman? Cannot two men also love each other? Are not two women also capable of an emotional attachment? If marriage is nothing more than a means to personal fulfillment, why should not any who wish to find fulfillment in it be free to do so with whomever they choose?

This then has been reinforced by the fifth cultural factor: **no-fault divorce**. Any idea of marriage as a permanent and exclusive covenant commitment has been severely undermined by no-fault divorce. Marriage can be terminated for any reason whatsoever. Furthermore, no-fault divorce destroys the notion of marriage as necessary for the welfare of children. If the good of children are readily sacrificed for the welfare and happiness of adult parents who chose for whatever reason to divorce, then on what basis can we argue that marriage has anything to do with the welfare of children? If anything, one might argue gay marriage is superior to heterosexual marriage simply on the basis that gay couples cannot biologically bear children and thus are less likely to damage children and society by potential divorces later on down the line.

These first five factors are those that to some degree we all share responsibility for. To the extent we have supported uncritically egalitarian notions of gender equality, have believed that freedom of choice is paramount, have fashioned God into a grandfatherly genie who exists for our happiness, have regarded marriage a merely an emotional

commitment for personal fulfillment, and have supported divorce for any and every reason, we are the tillers of the cultural soil from which gay marriage has taken root and blossomed. Given these conditions, these values and beliefs we often share with our culture, the only thing we should be surprised about is that acceptance of gay marriage took as long as it did to come to fruition. We're only now reaping the fruit of our cultural, theological, and philosophical labor. But there are two more factors that have contributed to the acceptance of gay marriage that are less directly our responsibility but have nonetheless had a significant impact on the turning tide.

The sixth factor is the **loss of cultural positions of power**. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the evangelical church retreated from the culture. We cocooned. We hid in our holy huddles. We left the reigns of cultural influence in the hands of others, so that as the influence of media rose through literature, radio, television, and film, we either rejected it as godless or created cheap imitations of it by creating our own sanitized versions that appealed and impacted only those already in our Christian bubble. As a result, we lost a voice in the arts and thereby lost the most powerful means by which we could impact cultural norms. Now those without a biblical worldview control the reigns of what television shows we watch and the movies we see along with the values and ethical norms embedded within them, deciding for us what values are to be promoted as normal and acceptable and conversely, which ones are up for ridicule and derision.

Finally, the seventh factor that has powerfully shaped the public discussion is **framing opposition to gay marriage as equivalent to racism**. A connection has been made repeatedly between gay rights and civil rights for blacks. Since both are claiming to fight for equality, those who oppose the one must oppose the other; therefore they are to be equated as bigots, racists, haters, and so on. Who in their right minds want to be associated with racists? Thus by connecting the struggle for gay rights with civil rights, guilt by association is automatically leveled against those who oppose gay marriage.

So those are what I see as seven significant cultural streams that have created the rising river of acceptance of same-sex marriage that we're experiencing today. And where then are we today? Well as I'm sure you all know the Supreme Court has ruled on two particular cases this past week that are not beneficial for those who support traditional marriage. So let me move on to our second point this morning and address...

## 2. Where we are

This week the Supreme Court ruled on two cases: the first concerned the legality of the Defense of Marriage Act passed in 1996, in particular the third section which restricted benefits such as insurance, Social Security survivor benefits, joint filing of tax returns to those in heterosexual marriages. The Court rejected it because it was seen as both a violation of state rights and a violation of the Fifth Amendment protection of personal liberty against governmental authority. The Defense of Marriage Act was viewed by the majority as such (and I quote), *"The avowed purpose and practical effect of the law here in question are to impose a disadvantage, a separate status, and so a stigma upon all who enter into same-sex marriages made lawful by the unquestioned authority*

*of the States.*” Thus to preserve state rights and not restrict personal liberty in violation of the Fifth Amendment, the Court ruled against the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act.

The second decision concerned Proposition 8 in California which temporarily suspended same-sex marriage. The Court struck this down due to a more technical question of jurisdiction in that it ruled that private parties do not have proper "standing" to defend California's voter-approved ballot measure barring gay and lesbian couples from state-sanctioned wedlock. In short, it means a third party that doesn't have a personal stake in the issue under consideration shouldn't be able to oppose legislation in regards to that issue. Think of it as someone resisting legislation regarding the breeding of horse who himself has no horses, isn't in the horse breeding business, and has never owned a horse. In other words, those who petitioned for Proposition 8 were wrongly meddling in other people's business.

Now it is easy to be discouraged by these decisions, but in essence not much has really changed. The Supreme Court has ruled in favor of state rights, which if you're politically conservative, you will begrudgingly need to agree with. The government is not choosing to demand states to abide by a universal federal decision. So in essence, we are much at the same place we were before: each state can choose whether to recognize same-sex marriage and the attendant legal benefits that come with it. The federal government is neither demanding they do so nor prohibiting it. It's still a matter of state rights to decide the issue for themselves.

Nevertheless, this does not bode well for those who value traditional marriage. It is another sign of the eroding support for the place of privilege for heterosexual marriage, not just in the opinions of the average Joe on the street, but within our legal code. And while laws do not objectively make a moral evil right, the law serves as a powerful force to shape our subjective understanding of what is right and wrong. As more and more states ratify same-sex marriage – and I assure you the majority will over time as younger generations vote – the more entrenched will it become both legally and in the convictions of the average American. In short, this matter is not going away; we are no longer able to turn back the hands of time. The game is lost. The foundations necessary to support traditional marriage have long since been eroded, as I highlighted in my first point; it was just a matter of time before they came crashing down.

So we must ask, “What now shall we do? Where do we go from here? How are we as people of faith to respond to this troubling cultural earthquake?” Let me address those questions by having us now consider our third and final point this morning, which is...

### **3. Where do we go from here**

First, as we look down the road ahead, we need to be warned of what is coming. Now I am not one who believes in being reactionary such that we panic like Chicken Little and scream, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling,” but neither should we don rose-colored glasses while the wolves are invading the hen-house. So I offer you two predictions of what is coming down the road, so that in being forewarned we might be better prepared.

To begin, it is widely recognized by those who support traditional marriage that the reasons used to support same-sex marriage equally apply to other forms of union, such as polygamy. In the landmark book *“What Is Marriage?”* by Girgis, Anderson, and George – a book that lays out a non-religious defense of traditional marriage I’d highly recommend you read– they say this:

*“...if you insist as a matter of principle that we should recognize same-sex relationships as marriages, the same principle will require you to accept (and favor legally recognizing) polyamorous... and nonsexual relationships as marriages. If you think [traditional] marriage laws unjustly discriminate against same sex relationships, you will have no way of showing why the same is not true of multiple-partner and nonsexual ones.”*<sup>1</sup> (pg. 20)

All it takes is for polygamy to be given the same light of day in the media and in the courts as homosexual marriage has been given. We may generally oppose it now as a culture, but to be consistent, the arguments used to support same-sex marriage also apply to a man and two women, or three women and two men, or roommates in a non-sexual relationship that wish to be bound together in order to enjoy the benefits legal state-sanctioned marriage provides. After all, why should marriage be limited to only two people or why must sex or love be a necessary ingredient for marriage? As Tina Turner once sang, “What’s love got to do with it?” Shouldn’t I be free to marry whoever I want, regardless of gender, number, or emotional attachment? What is good for the gay marriage goose is good for the polygamous gander. Legalized polygamy and beyond is coming: once the legal Pandora’s box of radically redefining marriage has been opened, and it is now opening ever wider, it will be the inevitable result.

A second warning concerns the erosion of religious liberties that will come and has already begun as a result of the legalization of same-sex marriage. In 2006 Catholic Charities in Boston stopped providing adoption services due to the state requirement that they allow homosexual couples to adopt. The owner of Victoria’s Cake Cottage in Des Moines is facing possible litigation and a public smear campaign after she refused to make a cake for a lesbian couple due to religious convictions.<sup>2</sup> In New Mexico, Elaine Photography is in a legal battle after they declined to photograph a lesbian couple’s commitment ceremony.<sup>3</sup> In February of this year, Canada’s Supreme Court ruled that anti-gay rhetoric is hate speech, whether it reflects religious belief or not.<sup>4</sup> I could go on, but you get the idea. There are coming serious legal threats to those who refuse to bow to the cultural pressure to accept gay marriage, especially Christian business owners whose values and convictions will be pitted against the threat of litigation and public humiliation. One only need recall what Chick-Fil-A faced last year when its owner did nothing more than vocalize his support of traditional marriage.

On Wednesday Ross Douthat wrote this insightful comment in the New York Times in regards to what we may be facing in regards to religious liberty in the near future:

*“Unless something dramatic changes in the drift of public opinion, the future of religious liberty on these issues is going to depend in part on the [good will] of gay marriage supporters — the extent to which they are content with political, legal and cultural victories that leave the traditional view of marriage as a minority perspective*

*with some modest purchase in civil society, versus the extent to which they decide to use every possible lever to make traditionalism as radioactive in the America of 2025 as white supremacy or anti-Semitism are today. And I can imagine a scenario in which... a large number of (mostly southern) states hewing to the older definition for much longer than the five years that gay marriage advocates currently anticipate, ends up encouraging a more scorched-earth approach to this battle, with less tolerance for the shrinking population of holdouts, and a more punitive, 'they're getting what they deserve' attitude toward traditionalist religious bodies in particular."*

In other words, if gay rights advocates wish to push their agenda to the extreme (and past results give us a good idea of future performance) then religious liberty in regards to those who hold to a biblical view of sexuality and marriage are in for a rough ride.

So what should we do? Or to put it in the words of Francis Schaeffer, how should we then live? To all of us here who are Christians living amidst the dark, swirling and threatening storm clouds of cultural change, I offer these four final words:

First, **expect persecution**. We need to get over this mistaken notion that America is God's chosen nation that we were once a Christian nation and we need to reclaim our heritage for Christ. Let us lay that myth to rest and realize that whatever we once were, we are not that now nor will we ever return to some glorious lost yesterday. Things have changed and it does us no good romanticize the past when we ought to be facing the realities of the present. Persecution is coming for those who hold to a traditional understanding of marriage and we Christians are not immune. Either now or very soon it may cost you your job, your business, and your reputation. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that *"others [will] revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account"* and in John 15:20 he said, *"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* Persecution is the norm for Christians – we have been blessed for a long time here in the Western world as Christian values have held place of privilege, but no longer.

And if you doubt that, I have two words for you: Paula Deen. If anyone has had a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad week, it's the Food Network's Paula Deen. This week she has been dropped by the cable network that made her famous, Wal-Mart has cut ties with her and will no longer carry her products, and has been crucified in the media. And what is her crime? She admitted to using a racial slur thirty years ago. That's it. Now follow me here: if this is what is done to someone who made a racist comment decades ago, what are we to expect when we say anything against gay marriage or homosexual behavior today now that opposition to gay marriage has been equated with racism? In the eyes of our culture, this is no distinction between a racist and those who support traditional marriage. No my friends, you will be persecuted for your belief in the biblical view of marriage and homosexuality. It is no longer a vague possibility; it is a growing reality and we must be prepared to face it.

The way we prepare to face it brings me to my second thing I want to say to you: **stand firm in your biblical convictions**. When the pressure of persecution comes, it will be tempting to capitulate and give in. It's always easier to live a lie than to suffer the truth.

You must decide where you'll stand. If you believe the Bible's clear and unambiguous teaching regarding human sexuality and the nature of marriage, then you must decide now what you accept and what you won't. How will you respond to the pressures at work? What will you do if you run a business and are legally required to recognize a homosexual couple either by providing them a service or paying them benefits? How will you deal with the promotion of acceptance of homosexuality within your child's school? These are just a few of many hard questions we must ask ourselves, where our convictions will conflict with the cultural norms. We need wisdom to navigate this new cultural landscape, but even more we need the strength of conviction to not become blown over by the pressures but rather stand firmly on the Word of God.

Third, let me encourage you to **remember the power of the gospel**. Although our society has changed and will continue to change towards greater acceptance of homosexuality, the gospel has not changed. It is still *"the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). The transformative work of the gospel to bring sinners to repentance has lost none of its potency! Let me remind you of the apostle Paul's glorious words in 1 Corinthians 6,

*"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

Did you hear that? *"And such were some of you."* God is still on his throne and through the preaching of the gospel he takes sinners of all types washes them clean, sets them apart, and justifies them through faith in Christ, so that they are no longer what they once were. Thus Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!"* So do not despair. The power of the gospel to transform sinners remains, even for those entrenched in sins that are celebrated and promoted. We possess in the gospel the one thing to bring true life, true joy, and true peace to those in need of redemption, so take heart!

Finally, I would encourage you to **robe yourself in love and compassion**. It is so easy for us to be sore losers, isn't it? We're like little kids want to get up and kick the game board over and say nasty snide remarks to those who beat us, but that will not do. Jesus instructed us, *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44). That applies to those who are vigorously supporting same-sex marriage and equally vigorously slandering and suing us. We need to love them and show them compassion, recognizing they are spiritually blind, enslaved to their passions, without God and without hope in this world.

I know the feelings you all feel when you watch these things celebrated on the news, when words like "bigot" and "homophobic" are hurled against you, when you watch helplessly as the moral foundations crumbles around your feet. It is easy to give into anger, to fight the fire of spiteful words with fiery words of your own, to avenge the

wrongs done to you. But like Peter, we must sheath our swords and not fight this battle with the same weapons the world uses. Our weapons are the gospel, kindness, love, mercy, gentleness, turning the other cheek, and suffering. We must love those who hate us, show compassion to those who will show none to us, and grace to those who mock and ridicule us. It is what Christ did for us and therefore it is what those of us who bear his name and call him Lord must do for others.

## Conclusion

With that, I want to conclude now by reading an open letter that was written to churches by a Christian woman who struggles with same-sex desires. It's easy to point our fingers at "those people" who exist outside our doors. But the reality is there are men and women within the church who struggle with homosexual desires, who love Christ but still struggle. It is during conversations that take place during weeks such as these that those among us who wrestle with same-sex attraction feel the most alienated. I hope by reading this letter I can help give those believers a voice and remind us of the need for greater love and sensitivity for those among us and outside of us who desperately need it.

"To the churches concerning homosexuals and lesbians:

Many of you believe that we do not exist within your walls, your schools, your neighborhoods. You believe that we are few and easily recognized. I tell you we are many. We are your teachers, doctors, accountants, high school athletes. We are all colors, shapes, sizes. We are single, married, mothers, fathers. We are your sons, your daughters, your nieces, your nephews, your grandchildren. We are in your Sunday School classes, pews, choirs, and pulpits. You choose not to see us out of ignorance or because it might upset your congregation. We ARE your congregation. We enter your doors weekly seeking guidance and some glimmer of hope that we can change. Like you, we have invited Jesus into our hearts. Like you, we want to be all that Christ wants us to be. Like you, we pray daily for guidance. Like you, we often fail.

When the word "homosexual" is mentioned in the church, we hold our breaths and sit in fear. Most often this word is followed with condemnation, laughter, hatred, or jokes. Rarely do we hear any words of hope. At least we recognize our sin. Does the church as a whole see theirs? Do you see the sin of pride, that you are better than or more acceptable to Jesus than we are? Have you been Christ-like in your relationships with us? Would you meet us at the well, or restaurant, for a cup of water, or coffee? Would you touch us even if we showed signs of leprosy, or aids? Would you call us down from our trees, as Christ did Zacchaeus, and invite yourself to be our guest? Would you allow us to sit at your table and break bread? Can you love us unconditionally and support us as Christ works in our lives, as He works in yours, to help us all to overcome?

And to those of you who would change the church to accept the gay community and its lifestyle: you give us no hope at all. To those of us who know God's word and will not dilute it to fit our desires, we ask you to read John's letter to the church in Pergamum. "I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore!" You are willing to compromise the word of God to be

politically correct. We are not deceived. If we accept your willingness to compromise, then we must also compromise. We must therefore accept your lying, your adultery, your lust, your idolatry, your addictions, YOUR sins. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

We do not ask for your acceptance of our sins any more than we accept yours. We simply ask for the same support, love, guidance, and most of all hope that is given to the rest of your congregation. We are your brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not what we shall be, but thank God, we are not what we were. Let us work together to see that we all arrive safely home.

A Sister in Christ”<sup>5</sup>

### **Endnotes**

1. Girgis, Sherif, Rayan T. Anderson, Robert P. George. What Is Marriage? Encounter Books: New York, 2012.
2. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-homosexual-assault-on-religious-freedom-97602/>
3. Ibid.
4. <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2013/02/27/1647321/canadian-supreme-court-upholds-hate-speech-laws-against-anti-gay-activist/?mobile=nc>
5. <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2013/03/21/an-open-letter-to-the-church-from-a-lesbian/>

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2013.**