**Truth Currents** **6-19-20**

 One time I had a lawyer in our church approach me and said, “You know, I think you would make a great lawyer.” I wasn’t sure if there was punch line following that or what his intention was.

He went on to explain. He said, “Really, what you do, is suited to exactly to what I have to do.”

 He said, “First of all, lawyers often have to stand in front of a crowd of people, typically a jury. And they have to lay out a case to persuade those people to act in a particular way.”

 I said, “I can see that. That’s something that a Pastor does. He stands in front of an audience and tries to persuade them that what he’s saying is true and they should act in certain way because of it.”

 He said, “But secondly, one of the jobs of a lawyer is we take obscure language in documents that are hard to understand and we interpret them for people so that they can understand what is being said, what they are agreeing to, what the contract means.”

 He said, “Every time you stand up to teach you take words that are sometimes obscure, from a different culture, in a different language, and you lay them out in a way so that we can understand what they mean.”

 And I thought, well maybe I would have been a good lawyer. But, I’m glad I’m not. But it was an interesting conversation.

 Well, I thought about that conversation this week because that process of taking language and following the rules of hermeneutics… Now hermeneutics is just a fancy word that means the rules for interpretation. There are certain guidelines, not just for Biblical texts for example, but for any kind of texts. There are hermeneutical rules for people who study ancient literature. There are hermeneutical rules for people who study legal documents. There are hermeneutical rules for medical documents. There are ways that you interpret according to certain parameters. We call that hermeneutics.

 I have to come to a text and I have to first and foremost determine what the author’s intent was in the words that he used. You see it really doesn’t matter… It drives me crazy when I see people read a passage of Scripture in a group setting and say, “*Ok, what do you all take out of this? What do you think about this?*”

 It really doesn’t matter, what you take out of it, what you think. What matters is what the original intended author to say. Now, in order to understand that, we take their historical context, the audience they were writing to, the language that they used, the specific words that they chose. And within those parameters we determine the authors intent. Before we can understand the text we have to know what the author meant to say. What did the initial audience understand when they heard these words for the very first time?

 If I stand up and preach and I tell you that “*this means something to me*,” and I just pull something out of thin air, you would say, “That’s not preaching. That is an abuse of the rules of hermeneutics.”

 Well, this week we had that very thing happen in the Supreme Court of the United States. In a case called Bostock vs Clayton County, the ruling was handed down on Monday of this week. And what the court did was by a 6-3 decision they revisited an argument that is about almost 60 years old. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has a statement that says this, “An employer may not discriminate against an employee because of his Race, Color, Religion Sex or National Origin.”

 The debate in recent years has been, “*What is the definition of Sex?*” Well, the issue should be, “*What was the original intention of the authors of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?*” No one disagrees that the original intention was to prevent legal discrimination based upon biological sex. That is, to give men and women equal standing before the law in matters where discrimination could create an unfair playing field.

 In the almost 60 years since that time, Congress has had multiple opportunities to change that language, to clarify it, to expand it or to narrow it depending on if there was some misunderstanding on what they intended. They have not done that. And so, almost 60 years later, the Supreme Court ruled this week, that even though the definition of sex in 1964 in that document was limited to biological sex, the new ruling is that this term is meant to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

In other words, the document affectively now reads, “An employer may not discriminate against an employee because of his Race, Color, Religion, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or National Origin.” It is an assault on proper interpretation of words.

I read one writer this week defending the decision saying that words evolve and they change in their meanings over time. Well, if that’s the case than we can throw out anything that’s ever been written. It doesn’t matter what anybody said yesterday, or two weeks ago, or two thousand years ago because nothing has meaning except the meaning that, we as the current reader, impute into the words. So, what that argument would do is affectively say that nothing that’s ever been written before today means anything. Words have no meaning. There’s no way to ever recognize what the original author intended to say to us.

Folks, this is a dangerous, “Step Forward.” It is precisely the kind of thing that George Orwell talked about in his prescient novel 1984.

What does it mean for us? You say, “Pastor, are you against equal protection for all citizens?” No, absolutely not. In fact, as Christians we believe that every person is made in the image of God. Which means that every person has immeasurable dignity and they need to be treated with respect. Ok, that’s not the issue here. The issue here now is that Title VII has now been made to include a broad spectrum of potential cases that the original legislatures never foresaw and did not intend.

Now, I’ve been told in conversations this week that my objection is an overreaction because Justice Gorsuch went out of his way in his opinion to make the case that religious liberty will not be impacted. Basically, the Freedom of Religious Restoration Act along with what is called the “Ministerial Exception” along with the Title VII protections of religious liberty, that are already in place, those potentially are meant to guarantee that we will never be forced to make decisions within a religious community based on these standards. That is, we won’t have to hire people who fundamentally believe in a way that contradicts our faith system.

I understand that. But I also understand this problem. That is, that as the Secularist worldview continues to progress… And one of the things that Secularism requires is unrestrained sexual mores in a culture. It is cold comfort to me to be told that my religious liberty will not be impacted by this, when the reality is the day is coming where the demand for sexual freedom in practice will conflict with the belief of Evangelical Christians, that there are standards for morality that are derived from the nature of God. And in that coming conflict there will not be peaceful co-existence.

Only one worldview can win. You say, “Well, but that will never happen. We’ll never get to that point.”

Well, let me tell you this. There is a case before the court right now that will probably have a decision come down later this summer. It is called “Our Lady of Guadalupe School vs Morrissey-Berru.” In this case, the challenge to the court is, “*Does the Ministerial Exception, does the Title VII protection of religious liberty, does the Freedom of Religion Restoration Act … do those cover other faith-based ministries beyond churches?*”

In other words, “Ok, I won’t have to hire somebody onto the staff of my church who disagrees foundationally with our core belief system that we hold to as the people of Evergreen. That’s great.”

But will a Christian school, will a non-profit ministry with a religious foundation, will they be able to have those same religious liberty protections? The court will decide that later this summer.

Listen, I’m not a Constitutional law expert. I’m just telling you this. The decision that came down this week required a violation of the rules of interpretation. They changed the meaning of words. And unlike the Bible that was written two thousand years ago, these are words written by people who have had the opportunity to revise and clarify those words for 60 years. And yet in the ensuing decades since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress has chosen not to do that. So, the Supreme Court of the United States this week bypassed the Legislative branch of government and they made law.

Here’s the result for us. We need to get past this idea that electing the right politicians and appointing the right judges will solve the problems of this nation.

In the little book of Obadiah in verse 15,

*“For the Day of the LORD is near, against all the nations. As you have done, so it will be done to you; what you deserve will return on your own head.”*

 Here’s the bottom line. We gotta spend a little less of our precious priority on political campaigning and a little more of our desperate energy assaulting the Throne of Grace and crying out for God to move by His Spirit across our land.

 Evergreen, don’t forget this. It looks like the game is stacked against us. Except the God of all nations is on our side.

 Do not grow weary in doing good. In Jesus Name, Amen.