

Redefining Words Problematic

By Russell Moore



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The Supreme Court of the United States released its long-awaited decision June 15 in the case of *Bostock v. Clayton County, Ga.*, over whether sexual orientation and gender identity are included in the definition of “sex” in Title VII of federal non-discrimination laws.

The Court ruled in an opinion written by Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch that the definition of “sex” in the laws does, in fact, include sexual orientation and gender identity despite the fact that legislators repeatedly voted against including those categories in the legislation.

The precedents set here will have major implications on how the meaning of words in a law originally passed many years ago will be interpreted today and in the future. This will mean that legislators actually won’t know what they are voting to pass, because words might change cultural meaning between the time of passage and some future court case.

The ruling also will have seismic implications for religious liberty, potentially setting off years of lawsuits and court struggles – for example, religious organizations with religious convictions about the meaning of sex and sexuality.

This Supreme Court decision should hardly be surprising, given how much has changed culturally on the meanings of sex and sexuality. That the sexual revolution is supported here by justices known as both conservatives and progressives should also be of little surprise to those who have watched developments in each of these ideological corners of American life.

Whatever the legal and legislative challenges posed by this decision, they are hardly the most important considerations. What is most important is for the church to see where a biblical vision of sexuality and family is out of step with the direction of American culture.

For 2,000 years, the Christian tradition rooted in the Bible has taught that human beings are limited by our createdness. We are not self-created, nor are we self-determining beings. God has created us, from the beginning, male and female. That is a concept articulated at the very onset of the biblical canon (Genesis 1:27) and reaffirmed by our Lord Jesus (Mark 10:6).

That's because this creation order is not arbitrary, but intended to point beyond itself to the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:32). Here the church has stood, and will stand.

This will mean teaching the next generation of Christians why such distinctions are good and not endlessly elastic. We do that by rejecting both a spirit of the age that would erase created distinctions between men and women and those that would exaggerate them into stereotypes not revealed in Scripture.

This will also mean that we train up our children to see how such are matters rooted not in cultural mores but in the Gospel itself, and it will mean we provide not just teaching but models.

Those who decry the sexual revolution but approve of or participate in sexual revolutions of their own – excusing, for instance, adultery, sexual abuse, or pornography – will have and should have no credibility.

Instead, what is needed is an ongoing demonstration of counter-cultural fidelity, accountability, and love – and a recognition of the kinds of limits that make human life good and livable. At the same time, we can be the people who

recognize that those who disagree with us are our mission field to be persuaded and not a sparring partner to denounce.

We must have both conviction and kindness, both courage and patience, both truth and grace.

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