

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Pastors Dexter Skepple, Reginald Perry And Father John Mark Respond To Same-Sex Marriage Ruling

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ST. CROIX -- Yesterday the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a [landmark decision](#) in favor of same-sex couples, ruling that they were to be afforded the same rights as heterosexuals and be allowed to marry freely and receive all the benefits of marriage. The news shook the U.S. and the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#), with residents and diasporas alike expressing their excitement or dismay, for what had occurred.

The territory has long been deeply-rooted in the Judeo-Christian faith, and there are over 300 Churches on St. Croix alone. It was only logical, then, to search the minds of three of the island's most prominent ministers of the gospel: Dexter Skepple of Speak the Word Ministries; Reginald Perry of Victorious Believers Ministries; and Father John Mark, Priest

at St. Joseph Catholic Church, seeking their opinions on the decision that's already changing the way people view same-sex couples.

The Bible says that a man shall leave his mother and his father and cleave to his wife, a woman. A wife is a woman; a wife is not a man. - Dexter Skepple.

Skepple said his initial reaction to the ruling was utter shock, and he encouraged Christians to remain immovable in their faith.

"Don't change your opinion of what God says marriage is," Skepple began. "The Christians in the body of Christ should not change their opinion because the Supreme Court did not make marriage so



Pastor Dexter Skepple ministers

to a capacity crowd on Old Year's Night, 2014 at Speak the Word Ministries, St. Croix.

Skepple, 47, founded Speak the Word with his wife, Terry Skepple, on October 8, 1998 and serves a congregation of roughly 500 parishioners. He said if Christian entrepreneurs in the business of providing services to couples engaged to be married meet resistance from same-sex couples who they choose not to serve, the decision rests with these business owners, but left up to Skepple, who doubles as pilot, the business would shutdown.

"That's up to the individual, but I wouldn't," Skepple said, speaking of providing wedding-related services to same-sex couples. "I guess I'd have to find another type of business because every person should be led by their morals."

He continued: "The Bible says that a man shall [leave his mother and his father](#) and cleave to his wife, a woman. A wife is a woman; a wife is not a man. So the Bible defined what marriage was in the book of Genesis. The second chapter of the first book dealt with marriage right off the bat."

And to persons who disagree with the Bible, Skepple said the words of the bestselling book will outlive its doubters.

"That's been the book that started the world. Before you came that book was and after you're gone that book still will be. The book is not going anywhere."

If they legalize marijuana and marijuana is wrong, you don't go and smoke it. -
Reginald Perry.

Perry's views mirrored those of Skepple, making known that he too was surprised and disappointed when the news broke yesterday.

"Even if I knew it was coming, it was just a surprise that it happened to so fast," he said.

Perry, 46, originally from Chicago, has a congregation of just over 300 parishioners. He started Victorious Believers on October 23, 2005, and the ministry will host a special celebration on its tenth birthday.

But Perry contends that Christians need not be shaken by the events on June 26. He said the Bible is what believers have used as their moral compass and they should continue to follow its precepts.



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participate in it."

Pastor Reginald Perry, at Victorious

Believers Ministries, dances alongside congregants at a service.

The pastor went on: "People have said common-law marriage is good all over the country -- you live together seven years and you get a marriage license in some places -- but we, as Christians, don't believe that if you live together for seven years and get a marriage license that you're married; because the scripture establishes that it is wrong."

Perry said Christians are expecting the world to act like Christians, when "the world is doing exactly what the world does. It messes things up for the world. The things that they put in place are for their happy, for their gratification, and they see it as being fair for the nation, but again, we believe it's wrong according to the scripture," he said.

In relation to Christian reaction, Father Mark said part of the Catholic's way of viewing the new reality is to look back at similar cases, especially [Roe v. Wade](#) which was decided back in 1973, when abortion was legalized in the U.S. He said when the Supreme Court ruled, Christians were encouraged to continue being faithful to Jesus Christ and they continued speaking the truth, in love, about morality. Because of this, Father Mark said, "the country has slowly become more pro life."

"So I think that it's the same strategy that we're going to have to take with this question, because it doesn't matter what the Supreme Court says. Just because the court makes it legal doesn't make it right, and God's laws are still above the laws of men. So we will try as respectfully as we've done in the case of abortion, and respectfully disagree and to try and point people to the truth.

He continued: "I think that we shouldn't lose hope. I think that we should continue with the Lord, and like he himself said, if they speak all manner of evil against you for my sake, he says rejoice because your reward will be great in heaven. And we should also remember Jesus' words, which should reign until the end of time: the truth will set you free. We need to simply speak the truth in love," Father Mark said.

The well-learned priest, originally from Grenada, moved to Jamaica as a child and to St. Croix at age 10. He studied priesthood in Rome, Italy from 1997-2000, and has been the Head Priest at St. Joseph Catholic Church for five years.

Father Mark said the notion that yesterday's ruling won't affect Churches because of the 1st Amendment is "naive." He cited Justice Samuel Alito, who was very clear in his frustration with the new law -- questioning the long-term ramifications of the ruling for people who disagree with it now that it's the law of the land.

"Are people now going to be labeled as bigots and haters because they're going against what the law supposedly has decided?" he asked rhetorically. "That is obviously going to be affecting the Churches, and it's probably the first step in a long battle. And it's going to intensify as some people are going to want the Churches to be quiet and not speak up in the public square, and to do that you have to paint the believers as haters and bigots so they can pretty much shut up."

And in relation to Christian business owners who provide services to couples on the path to marriage, Father Mark said this is where true faith will be demonstrated.

It's hard to see how God blesses a nation who has decided to simply thumb their noses at his laws. - Father John Mark.

"This is where the rubber hits the road because it's part of what Jesus said," Father Mark, who is also the principal at St. Joseph High School, said. "Jesus said, 'if you want to be my follower, you have to take up your cross and follow me,' and he said they will hate you because of me, so we must be prepared for persecution."

"But he also said every hair on your head is counted, and that he will never abandon you. And so Christians have to find some way to try and navigate these legal problems, because Jesus said be wise as serpents and innocent as doves; but also remember that Jesus said following him comes at a price."



Father John Mark is the principal of the Catholic St. Joseph High School.

Even so, Father Mark cautioned Christians to treat same-sex couples with love and respect, as all sins should be regarded as such, with the biggest of them all being pride.

"The scripture admits that evil in and of itself is a mystery. Where I studied, they called it the mystery of iniquity. But that's why that passage in [2nd Corinthians](#) that speaks about Paul's thorn in the flesh is so powerful. And it's beautiful that Paul recognizes that. The problem is, in these modern days, we no longer recognize the thorn in the flesh like the thorns that they are or the sins that they are, which is problematic. But Paul recognized that and he asked the Lord to take it away from him -- whatever he was struggling with -- but the Lord gave a very beautiful answer. He said, you know, there's a worse sin here, and that's the sin of pride, which was the sin of the devil and the sin of the pharisees. And that's why Jesus got angry at the pharisees, because he saw pride.

"So Paul was told by Jesus that I will leave this here so you don't get proud."

When someone gets angry, it's up to that person to either yield to the anger and act upon it, or decide to follow Jesus Christ's way and choose peace, Father Mark said. And while he agrees that there's still ongoing debates on how the same-sex attraction comes about, the acts are contrary to what is considered normal, both by natural law and the precepts of God," he added.

"One of the reasons I was very sad yesterday is because I remembered [what happened with Sodom and Gomorrah](#) in the Old Testament. This is the source of my sadness, because I have nieces and nephews that are going to be growing up now in this world. But what happens when we human beings decide that we're going to thumb our nose at God, that we'll listen to what the devil said to Adam and Eve when he told Eve, listen, God doesn't want you to eat that fruit because he knows if you do, you will be a God

yourself and you will get to decide what is right and wrong.

"You see that's an old temptation. It's what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. God doesn't force you to do right or wrong; he allows you to decide for yourself. So when our country decides that we're going to make something legal that God has told us clearly is wrong and evil, what does that mean? What are the consequences of such a decision for the nation?

"That's what made me sad and worried in a sense for the future. It's hard to see how God blesses a nation who has decided to simply thumb their noses at his laws. And that's why our country really needs prayer and mercy," Father Mark concluded.

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