

Here We Stand: An Evangelical Declaration on Marriage

A declaration from a coalition of evangelical leaders assembled by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, June 26, 2015

As evangelical Christians, we dissent from the court's ruling that redefines marriage. The state did not create the family, and should not try to recreate the family in its own image. We will not capitulate on marriage because biblical authority requires that we cannot. The outcome of the Supreme Court's ruling to redefine marriage represents what seems like the result of a half-century of witnessing marriage's decline through divorce, cohabitation, and a worldview of almost limitless sexual freedom. The Supreme Court's actions pose incalculable risks to an already volatile social fabric by alienating those whose beliefs about marriage are motivated by deep biblical convictions and concern for the common good.

The Bible clearly teaches the enduring truth that marriage consists of one man and one woman. From Genesis to Revelation, the authority of Scripture witnesses to the nature of biblical marriage as uniquely bound to the complementarity of man and woman. This truth is not negotiable. The Lord Jesus himself said that marriage is from the beginning (Matt. 19:4-6), so no human institution has the authority to redefine marriage any more than a human institution has the authority to redefine the gospel, which marriage mysteriously reflects (Eph. 5:32). The Supreme Court's ruling to redefine marriage demonstrates mistaken judgment by disregarding what history and countless civilizations have passed on to us, but it also represents an aftermath that evangelicals themselves, sadly, are not guiltless in contributing to. Too often,

professing evangelicals have failed to model the ideals we so dearly cherish and believe are central to gospel proclamation.

Evangelical churches must be faithful to the biblical witness on marriage regardless of the cultural shift. Evangelical churches in America now find themselves in a new moral landscape that calls us to minister in a context growing more hostile to a biblical sexual ethic. This is not new in the history of the church. From its earliest beginnings, whether on the margins of society or in a place of influence, the church is defined by the gospel. We insist that the gospel brings good news to all people, regardless of whether the culture considers the news good or not.

The gospel must inform our approach to public witness. As evangelicals animated by the good news that God offers reconciliation through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we commit to:

- ♦ *Respect and pray for our governing authorities even as we work through the democratic process to rebuild a culture of marriage (Rom. 13:1-7);*
- ♦ *Teach the truth about biblical marriage in a way that brings healing to a sexually broken culture;*
- ♦ *Affirm the biblical mandate that all persons, including LGBT persons, are created in the image of God and deserve dignity and respect;*
- ♦ *Love our neighbors regardless of whatever disagreements arise as a result of conflicting beliefs about marriage;*
- ♦ *Live respectfully and civilly alongside those who may disagree with us for the sake of the common good;*
- ♦ *Cultivate a common culture of religious liberty that allows the freedom to live and believe differently to prosper.*

The redefinition of marriage should not entail the erosion of religious liberty. In the coming years, evangelical institutions could be pressed to sacrifice their sacred beliefs about marriage and sexuality in order to accommodate whatever demands the culture and law require. We do not have the option to meet those demands without violating our consciences and surrendering the gospel. We will not allow the government to coerce or infringe upon the rights of institutions to live by the sacred belief that only men and women can enter into marriage.

The gospel of Jesus Christ determines the shape and tone of our ministry. Christian theology considers its teachings about marriage both timeless and unchanging, and therefore we must stand firm in this belief. Outrage and panic are not the responses of those confident in the promises of a reigning Christ Jesus. While we believe the Supreme Court has erred in its ruling, we pledge to stand steadfastly, faithfully witnessing to the biblical teaching that marriage is the chief cornerstone of society, designed to unite men, women, and children. We promise to proclaim and live this truth at all costs, with convictions that are communicated with kindness and love.