

October 2017

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

On August 29, 2017 the 'Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood' released a statement about the biblical view of human sexuality and gender roles entitled 'The Nashville Statement – A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality.' It was signed by many Christian leaders who we would respect.

As you will read in the preamble the goal was to take a stand on the truth of the Bible, even while many professing Christians are beginning to waver on these issues in light of our current culture.

Brothers and sisters we need to stand for the truth no matter what our culture does or thinks about us. Thus I thought it would be good for you to read the statement and be aware of the current debate among Christians. After the statement we have included an article written by one of the signers who has a unique testimony.

As you read what follows, ask the Lord to give you an understanding of the Scriptures as well as a love for all people. We do not hate people who are involved with these issues; instead we want to lovingly invite people to Christ and the salvation and strength that He promises to all (Matt. 11:28-30).

– Pastor Joshua



NASHVILLE

STATEMENT

A COALITION FOR BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

Preamble

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God's design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God's beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual's autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God's good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of shortsighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonor God.

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she

hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?

We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it—particularly as male and female. Christian Scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is Creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad-hearted thanksgiving, heart-felt praise, and total allegiance. This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our Creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself. And we cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God's design for his creation and his way of salvation serve to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good. God's good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure. He is for us and not against us. Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ's church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

Article 1

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is

meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church.

WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

Article 2

WE AFFIRM that God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage.

WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

Article 3

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female.

WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

Article 4

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing.

WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

Article 5

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

Article 6

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about “eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb.” With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known.

WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

Article 7

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

Article 8

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life.

WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

Article 9

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality— a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality.

WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.

Article 10

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness.

WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

Article 11

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female.

WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image-bearers as male and female.

Article 12

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

Article 13

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self-conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.

WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with

God's revealed will.

Article 14

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure.

WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

Why I Signed the Nashville Statement

by Rosaria Butterfield

Great battles in theology faced by the church over the centuries have been caused by the introduction of unbiblical categories about the nature of people and the nature of God, and the imprecise language that emerges from this. Are we justified by faith or are we justified by faith alone? Does the Bible contain the word of God or is the Bible the word of God? Should we refuse to bake cakes for gay weddings because marriage is a creation-mandated institution and not a social privilege that can be re-packaged as the world whims? Or should we bake two cakes because sexual orientation as a category of personhood erases sexual sin without the blood of Christ?

The issue is not primarily homosexuality; it's Scripture.

The issue is not primarily gay marriage; it's whether "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and

intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The issue is not whether people are good-intentioned and sincere in desiring things that God forbids.

The issue is whether we all bear the sin of Adam, inheriting an unchosen moral deformity, an energy of opposition to God, a rebellion that bequeaths to us a sin nature that we cannot erase on our own terms and by our own hands.

The issue is whether Jesus rose from the grave, is alive today, and whether His blood and love and resurrection makes any wit of difference in how you fight the original sin that distorts you, the actual sin that distracts you, and the indwelling sin that manipulates you.

The issue is whether you can trust the Bible to tell you who you are, who God is, and which way is up.

Twenty years ago, I lived as a lesbian. I delighted in my lover, our home on one of the Finger Lakes, our Golden Retrievers, and our careers. When Christ claimed me for His own, I did not stop feeling like a lesbian. I did not fall out of love with women. I was not converted out of homosexuality. I was converted out of unbelief.

Conversion to Christ did not initially change my sexual attraction for women. What conversion did change immediately was my heart and mind. My mind was on fire for the Bible and I could not read enough of it or enough about it. The gospel gave me a light that was ruinous. It ruined me for the life I had loved. The Lord's light illumined my sin through the law and illumined my hope through Jesus and the gospel. The gospel destroyed me before the Lord built me back up. In saying "yes" to Jesus and "no" to the desires

of my flesh, I learned that the only way to peace with my God was through the Cross—the one that Jesus died on and the one that I was called, with the help of Jesus, to carry.

In this crucible I wondered how this could be so. How could that which I loved be sin? How could I hate my sin without hating myself? How could I both hate my sin and feel drawn into it simultaneously?

I learned that sin does not lose its character as sin because I loved it. I learned that my homosexuality was a logical consequence of the fall of man, the thumbprint of original sin on some of us. It is true that some of us are born this way. It is also true that we are all born in sin, in one way or another. We can hate our sin without hating ourselves because we who have committed our lives to Christ stand in his righteousness and not our own. Our real identity is not in the sin we battle but in the savior we embrace.

Christ's salvation is definitive and decisive. Christ rescues his people, growing us in union with Christ, establishing us in God's family, the church, and setting us apart to bear the image of God in knowledge (of God's word), holiness and righteousness (through sanctification, also called growth in Christ).

We gain more than we lose when we pick up our cross and follow Jesus. But pick up our cross we must. And for many of us, our cross demands forsaking the sexual sin that calls us by name.

We live now in a world that has no use for the God of the Bible, for Jesus, the Savior of His people and of the world. The terms are shifting quickly. Calling people like me to forsake sexual sin is no longer considered a first step toward walking with Jesus in liberty

and in new life. Today, some influential people who claim to know Christ no longer believe that God hates sin. Sin is in the eyes of the beholder, they say.

Just a few years ago, these people blamed sin on the devil, saying “the devil made me do it.” Now these same people—some of them leaders in the church—blame sin on the Holy Spirit, declaring that He is blessing what the Bible condemns. In a few short years, blame shifting has morphed into blasphemy. And this blasphemy is coming from people who claim to have Christ's salvation and from the pulpits and blogs that they wield.

When blasphemy comes from the church, the Bible gives us ways to understand how prophets become lions and wolves. First Peter 5:8 issues the warning for today's church climate: “Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” Matthew 7:15 shows us what to do: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.” Christian fruit grows you in holiness, like Christ. Christian fruit grows you in grace—which is bought by the blood of Christ, the ransom price for my sin and yours. Grace leads you to love and desire the moral law of God, and not to despise it. Christian fruit has no measure but the word of God.

I signed the Nashville Statement because I stand with Biblical orthodoxy, which is inseparable from God's creation mandate and definition of gendered personhood found in Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them”. The

soul is God’s fingerprint on humanity, but the gendered body—essentially and ontologically male or female—will also, for the believer in Jesus Christ, be glorified and resurrected in the New Jerusalem.

I signed the Nashville Statement because my conscience compels me so, because the promises of liberty on the world’s terms are false and deceptive, and because many who currently claim to have Christ’s forgiveness and salvation must be called to account for leading good people astray with false promises and filthy lies.

I signed the Nashville Statement because the wolves are prowling, and the lions are roaring, and because they are bold and proud of their heresy, and because you must be warned.

By God through the merit and power of Jesus Christ, here I stand.

FUNNIES

My three-year-old daughter stuck out her hand and said, “Look at the fly I killed, Mommy.”

Since she was eating a juicy pickle at the time, I thrust her contaminated hands under the faucet and washed them with antibacterial soap.

After sitting her down to finish her pickle, I asked, with a touch of awe, “How did you kill that fly all by yourself?”

Between bites, she said, “I hit it with my pickle.”

What do you call a line of rabbits hopping backwards?

A receding hare line

I’ve been working on my PhD in engineering for the past five years, but my kids don’t necessarily see that as work.

As we were driving past Walmart one day, my son spotted a “Now Hiring” sign and suggested that I could get a job there.

Hoping to make a point, I asked, “Do you think they’re looking for an engineer?”

“Oh, sure,” he said. “They’ll hire anybody.”

A film crew was on location deep in the desert. One day an Old Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow rain."

The next day it rained. A week later, the Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow storm." The next day there was a hailstorm. "This Indian is incredible," said the director. He told his secretary to hire the Indian to predict the weather. However, after several successful predictions, the old Indian didn't show up for two weeks.

Finally the director sent for him. "I have to shoot a big scene tomorrow," said the director, "and I'm depending on you. What will the weather be like?"

The Indian shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know," he said. "Radio is broken."