

Dear Friends in Christ,

The issues of same-sex marriage, or gay marriage, and the broader topic of homosexuality are not only “hot” topics in our society, they are also tender issues that reach to the heart of many families and individuals. These are issues laced with personal and familial experiences that strike at the basic need we all share to love and be loved. As a result, it is difficult to discuss these matters objectively. Our desire is to do that very thing – to present these issues from a loving and compassionate perspective that seeks to share Biblical truth without compromising our desire to love all people (as Christ has loved us) without regard for their sexual orientation.

The Christian Church is often painted as “the enemy” of homosexual people. Unfortunately, this picture has often been exacerbated by poor and confusing communication from the Church. We, however, see this characterization as a misunderstanding of the Church and its role. Christian people are called to commit themselves to God and His Word. In doing so, we are called to love all people unconditionally while also standing firm on the truths expressed in the holy Word of God.

In response to many questions and concerns expressed over President Obama’s recent statements regarding gay marriage, we have prepared this statement. On the surface, this may seem a clear-cut issue to people on all sides of the argument. However, it is our belief that this issue is complicated and worthy of careful consideration. As a result, this statement is lengthy. Please take the time to work your way through each of the topics and consider each point. Please also, as time allows, take the time to consider the additional resources listed at the end of this document.

Finally, as you read this statement, know that we, your pastors, love you and your families. Our passion to share God’s love and encouragement with you, your families, and all people is deep and compelling in our lives. If you have concerns or questions about this document, please contact us.

God bless you!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Tucker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Bill Tucker, Senior Pastor
Concordia Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Texas
www.ConcordiaLutheranChurch.com

A Summary of the Statement

This past Wednesday, in an interview with ABC News, President Obama expressed his support of same-sex marriage. In response to the widespread questions over the president's comments, we thought it would be helpful to address the biblical stance on same-sex marriage in a four-section statement, prepared by the pastors of Concordia Lutheran Church. Because we know that not everyone will have the time or the inclination to read the full statement, what follows is a brief summary of the major points of the paper.

Compassion and Conviction

As Christians, we are called to address every sin and every sinner with both compassion and conviction. This is also true when it comes to the sins of homosexual activity and same-sex marriage. We must speak compassionately to those in homosexual lifestyles, calling to their attention Jesus' offer of salvation for those trapped in sexual sin (cf. Matthew 21:31). At the same time, we must also speak with conviction concerning the sinfulness of homosexual activity specifically and all sexual immorality generally (cf. Romans 1:25-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-12).

The Marriage Model

Our society is losing respect for the biblical model of marriage as a lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman until death parts them (cf. Matthew 19:4-6). The passage of no-fault divorce laws in many states, the prevalence of adultery, pre-marital sex, pornography, and marital abuse all demonstrate this. President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage is merely the latest example of an affront against the biblical model of marriage.

Civic Policy and the Divine Order

Christians can stand against same-sex marriage not only on the basis of the Scriptural witness, but also on the basis of natural, moral law. Because certain moral mandates are written on the heart of every human being (cf. Romans 2:14-15), our society adheres to a broad moral standard, derived from the natural order of things in our world. This is why murder, stealing, lying, and the like are punishable by our civic system. If we follow the natural order of things on these moral issues, why would we abandon this order when it comes to same-sex marriage?

Authority and Autonomy

Our society has a tendency to make moral judgments based not on absolute truth, but on shifting popular opinion. President Obama himself exemplifies this method of moralizing when, in his interview, he references practicing homosexuals he knows and has known as justification for his endorsement of same-sex marriage. As Christians, however, we cannot embrace the shifting sensibilities of our culture or our personal preferences to form our moral stances. Instead, we must turn to the one and final standard of morality and goodness: God Himself, revealed through His Word (cf. Luke 18:19).

We encourage you to read the full statement to learn more. As Christians committed to the witness of Scripture, this is most certainly an issue worthy of our time, attention, and thought.

A Pastoral Statement on President Obama's Endorsement of Same-Sex Marriage

This past Wednesday, in an interview with ABC News, President Obama expressed his support of what is commonly referred to as same-sex marriage, or gay marriage:

I have to tell you that over the course of several years as I have talked to friends and family and neighbors, when I think about members of my own staff who are in incredibly committed monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together, when I think about those soldiers or airmen or Marines or sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf and yet feel constrained, even now that Don't Ask Don't Tell is gone, because they are not able to commit themselves in a marriage, at a certain point I've just concluded that for me personally it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same sex couples should be able to get married.¹

President Obama's comments mark a major milestone in presidential politics. Never has an incumbent president called for the transformation of one of society's foundational institutions. Not surprisingly, a fury of political, sociological, and theological punditry has erupted around the president's statements.

In response to the widespread questions over the president's stance, because of the rampant confusion over homosexuality and its morality, and because this issue is not merely theoretical, but also relational and personal for many people, we thought it would be prudent to briefly address the biblical stance on this topic in four sections. These sections include: (1) The importance of speaking with both compassion and conviction about homosexuality and to homosexuals; (2) Reiterating the biblical model for marriage; (3) Understanding the interplay between the civic, political realm and the natural, moral realm; and (4) Submitting to Scripture's authority while recognizing the dangers of our rampant cultural autonomy. Let's address each of these areas briefly.

Compassion and Conviction

Holy Scripture is clear in its command: we are to show compassion to those caught in sexual sin, including homosexual sin, and we are to show and share the hope and forgiveness of the gospel with all sinners. Indeed, Jesus was known for His compassion toward those mired in sexual sin and even opened His kingdom to them. He says to the religious leaders of His day, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the *prostitutes* are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31). People caught in sexual sin are included in God's kingdom through faith in Christ. Such is the compassion and grace of our God. When a woman is caught in the act of adultery and the religious leaders seek to stone her, Jesus sends her accusers away and says, "I [do not] condemn you...Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). In an act of extravagant compassion and grace, Jesus forgives this woman's sin and saves her life. It is important to note,

¹ Rick Klein, "Obama Declares Support for Gay Marriage" (5.9.12), <http://news.yahoo.com/obama-announces-his-support-for-same-sex-marriage.html>.

however, that while Jesus offers His deep compassion, at the same time, He refuses to compromise His core conviction concerning the immorality of sexual sin. He calls this woman to repent of her sin and not to return to it. Thus, Jesus holds His compassion and conviction in perfect tension. This is why the Bible says that Jesus comes to us “full of grace [i.e., compassion] and truth [i.e., conviction]” (John 1:14). Both conviction and compassion are needed in a Christian’s response to homosexuality. This means that our homosexual neighbors, friends, and family members deserve both our love and kindness as well as our candid thoughts and concerns.

With this in mind, just as we are compelled by Holy Scripture to show compassion toward those trapped in homosexual sin, we are also compelled by Holy Scripture to state our conviction that homosexual activity is sinful. The apostle Paul writes pointedly:

[People have] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:25-27)

Please notice two things about Paul’s statements, inspired by the Holy Spirit, concerning homosexuality. First, at the root of the sin of homosexual practice is the sin of idolatry. The apostle argues that homosexual relationships exchange “the truth of God for a lie” and worship “created things [i.e., sexual desire] rather than the Creator.” Sexual sin, *along with every other sin*, tries to do no less than dethrone God and crown our own desires as supreme, regardless of and in contradiction to God’s will! It is an affront against the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Second, Paul clearly sees homosexual activity as morally unacceptable. Words such as “indecent” and “perversion” in verse 27 make this clear enough. Moreover, in verse 24, Paul calls homosexual activity a “sinful desire,” “sexual impurity,” and “degrading.” Scripture’s conviction on the practice of homosexuality is unequivocal: it is sinful.

The Marriage Model

President Obama’s endorsement of same-sex marriage is merely the latest in a long line of attacks resulting in the slow erosion of respect for the biblical model of marriage. Skye Jethani of *Christianity Today* explains:

The church was silent when state after state passed no-fault divorce laws. These bills essentially removed the state from any interest in preserving or defining marriage. No fault divorce laws defined marriage as an agreement between two individuals that may be entered or dissolved as the individuals desire without state interference or prejudice.²

² Skye Jethani, “Obama Endorses Same Sex Marriage – Now What?” (5.10.12), http://www.outofur.com/archives/2012/05/obama_endorses.html.

The final sentence is key. For if marriage is defined civically as merely “an agreement between two individuals that may be entered or dissolved as the individuals desire without state interference of prejudice,” the state is stripped of its ability to offer any definition of who those two individuals are and the kind of commitment those two individuals make. Is marriage between a man and a woman? A man and a man? A woman and a woman? Is it entered into under the assumption that it will be a lifelong union? None of this is defined *à la* our states’ no-fault divorce laws. Thus, so-called gay marriage is merely a consequential progression of the ambiguous marriage laws already on the books.

The Bible is not nearly so ambiguous. Its stance is clear: marriage is meant to be a life-long covenant relationship between one man and one woman until death parts them. This is part and parcel of God’s created order: “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This created order is reiterated and reinforced by Jesus Himself: “Haven’t you read...that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

The desire of Christians, then, should not be only to stand *against* same-sex marriage while loving homosexual people, but to stand *for* biblical marriage, being defined as the union between one man and one woman. This means that we ought to raise the alarm not only over same-sex marriage, but over adultery, pornography, divorce, abuse, and anything else that impugns the biblical model of marriage where one woman and one man commit to each other, become one flesh through sexual intimacy, and serve, honor, and love each other. Indeed, every married Christian should strive to attain this model in his or her marriage. Marriage is God’s gift to us, bestowed in love, and is intended to be both an example of His love for us (cf. Ephesians 5:31-32) and an opportunity for us to experience the blessing and joy of loving each other.

Civic Policy and the Divine Order

When President Obama made his comments supporting same-sex marriage, more than one evangelical Christian rushed to his defense. Consider this from an evangelical blogger:

Supporting gay marriage is not supporting sin. I know it is hard to grasp, but this matter has nothing to do with whether or not homosexuality is a sin. If it does, then you are probably being inconsistent since there are lots of things that Christians consider “sinful” that they do not legislate against. For instance, if God wants us as a nation to live by His laws, why are we okay supporting the freedom of religion? Shouldn’t we be out trying to ban other religions? If we are okay with freedom of religion, which is a law that basically mandates that our country allow for idolatry (according to the Christian), aren’t we being hypocritical?³

³ Jared Byas, “I Still Stand as an Evangelical for Gay Marriage” (5.9.12), <http://jbyas.com/2012/05/09/i-still-stand-as-an-evangelical-for-gay-marriage/>.

At first glance, some may find this argument compelling. If we support legislation against gay marriage because of our Christian belief that homosexuality is a sin, what other legislation are we required to support? Is insisting on a federally mandated Christianity an inextricable consequence of supporting a traditional definition of marriage in our civic law as this blogger suggests?

It is important to understand that legislation supporting traditional marriage is not theologically identical to federally mandated Christianity. The difference between the two can be found in the distinction between *general revelation* and *special revelation*. General revelation is that which can be known apart from Holy Scripture simply by observing God's created order and the moral implications of this created order. Another name for this is "natural law." Many of the Ten Commandments fall under this category of natural, moral law. For instance, our society still recognizes that murder runs contrary to natural, moral law. Likewise, lying, stealing, and (before the no-fault divorce laws cited above) even adultery has been considered by society-at-large to run contrary to this law. Thus, one does not have to be a Christian to accept and adhere to natural, moral law because this law is written on the hearts of all people apart from Scripture and faith in Christ (cf. Romans 2:14-15). In light of the universal character of this law, there are (and always have been) legal consequences in our civic system for actions which contradict natural law.

Homosexual practice and its immorality fall squarely within the realm of general revelation and natural, moral law. Consider again Paul's argument against homosexuality in Romans 1:

Women exchanged *natural* relations for *unnatural* ones. In the same way the men also abandoned *natural* relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:26-27)

Once more, note Paul's language. He speaks of "natural" and "unnatural" relations. "Natural" relations are those within heterosexual marriage while "unnatural" relations are those that are homosexual. In this passage, then, Paul does not argue against homosexuality using a divine command, but using creation's natural order. Thus, same sex marriage is contrary to natural, moral law. And if we as a society honor natural, moral law in instances such as murder, stealing, lying, and the like, why abandon such a precedent when it comes to marriage?

Special revelation is a different matter. Special revelation refers to that which can be known only through the Bible and has to do with God's specific and special plan to redeem humanity from its sinful condition. General revelation, then, encompasses all people while special revelation is found exclusively in the Old and New Testament Scriptures and declares a specific message of salvation through Christ. Thus, though Christians can support legislation that is broadly moral and applies to all according to the divine ordering of creation, we put ourselves in a precarious position when we demand civic laws that are specifically Christian in nature because faith in Christ cannot be coerced by legislation, it can only be shared by our witness. This is why, while standing against same-sex marriage, Christians do not demand legislation that forces people to worship the Triune God. Worship of the Triune God can be brought about only by faith in the gospel and not an edict of the government.

Authority and Autonomy

The way in which the news media has reported President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage has been quite telling concerning the way many of us often craft our moral views. Consider the following from CNN: "A Gallup Poll released Tuesday indicated 50% of Americans believe same-sex marriages should be recognized by law as valid, with 48% saying such marriages should not be legal."⁴ Many will cite polls like this one to make the case for the moral acceptability of gay marriage, making morality a mere function of democratic enterprise. Indeed, President Obama even cited a democratic acceptance of homosexuality, albeit in an anecdotal way, as part of his reasoning for endorsing same-sex marriage. Consider again his statement:

I have to tell you that over the course of several years as I have talked to friends and family and neighbors, when I think about members of my own staff who are in incredibly committed monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together, when I think about those soldiers or airmen or Marines or sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf and yet feel constrained, even now that Don't Ask Don't Tell is gone, because they are not able to commit themselves in a marriage, at a certain point I've just concluded that for me personally it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same sex couples should be able to get married.⁵

President Obama's reasoning for same-sex marriage is simply this: because he knows many people who are practicing homosexuals and are in committed relationships, same-sex marriage must be allowed!

As Christians, we must recognize this kind of reasoning for what it is: the expression of an individual moral autonomy that has influenced the thinking of President Obama as well as many in our society. This autonomy refuses to believe in any authority outside of itself. Blogger Rod Dreher summarizes:

This is the fundamental problem we face when we argue over gay marriage, abortion, contraception, and so forth. It's not about rights, not really; it's about what it means to be a person, and *what is the ultimate source of morality*.⁶

The fact of the matter is, for many people, "the ultimate source of morality," as Dreher calls it, is nothing more than an individual's own sensibilities and sensitivities. In other words, there is no standard of morality external to each individual. All morality is merely a personal construct, erasing absolute truth. This view of morality, of course, runs directly contrary to the Christian moral imperative which sees moral standards as external, rooted in the divine order and, finally, in God Himself! As Jesus says, "No one is good – except God alone" (Luke 18:19). God is the

⁴ Phil Gast, "Obama Announces He Supports Same-Sex Marriage" (5.9.12), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/09/politics/obama-same-sex-marriage/index.html>.

⁵ <http://news.yahoo.com/obama-announces-his-support-for-same-sex-marriage.html>.

⁶ Rod Dreher, "Same-Sex Marriage & Post-Christianity" (5.8.12), <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/2012/05/08/same-sex-marriage-post-christian/>.

one and final standard of goodness and morality. And He reveals His standard to us through His Word.

Moreover, when our culture's autonomous morality is coupled with a selfish hedonism, the results are predictable. Many people cannot imagine a God who would not want them to be happy. If homosexual activity brings them such happiness, the argument runs, such activity cannot be wrong. Statements such as, "If anyone would come after Me, he must *deny himself* and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever *loses his life* for Me will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25) are either ignored or rejected as impediments to personal fulfillment and happiness. Denying personal and sinful desires in deference to Christ and His call is clearly out of step with our prevailing culture autonomy.

As Christians, we are called to witness to the vanity of such hedonistic pursuits. Even when denying oneself is difficult – especially in the arena of sexual desire, be that heterosexual or homosexual desire – we are called to declare the message that pursuing any desire in a way that is not consistent with God's design will ultimately lead a person into choices that violate both divine law and basic moral constraints. True fulfillment and satisfaction, along with the strength to overcome our old, sinful nature, can be found only in Christ. As Paul writes, "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). And as Jesus promises, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Everything we need for fullness of life is found in Christ!

It is our prayer that this statement serves as a guide to clarify both the biblical record and its natural, moral law corollaries on same-sex marriage. We believe such a stance is foundational and necessary to the decent order and function of society-at-large. We hope, as well, that this statement can be of help to those seeking to share with others a charitable Christian perspective on this issue. We remain committed to both the biblical conviction against same-sex marriage and the biblical mandate to compassionately share Christ's love with all people regardless of sexual orientation.

Additional Resources

If you would like additional resources which address President Obama's statement endorsing same-sex marriage from a Christian perspective, you can consult the following:

- <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/05/09/how-to-win-the-public-on-homosexuality/>
- <http://www.edstetzer.com/2012/05/president-obama-and-same-sex-m.html>
- http://www.outofur.com/archives/2012/05/obama_endorses.html#more