

First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa Declaration

Adopted October 20, 2013

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The congregation of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa has a distinctly Christian heritage of over two hundred years of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through God's Word, seeking justice in our community and society, and reaching out with compassion to the poor, oppressed, and suffering.

Like those who have gone before us in the faith, we believe that we are called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to remain true to the Word of God as our sole authority, to protect the intrinsic dignity of the human person, and to stand for the common good.

Because we believe that the sanctity of human life, the dignity of biblical marriage as the union of one man and one woman, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, and are clearly-taught principles in the Bible; and because these vital principles are being compromised in our society to the detriment of the common good, the congregation of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa is compelled by our Christian faith and convictions to speak and act in their defense.

Sanctity of Human Life

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:27 (NASU)

Because we believe that God created every human being in His image and that life, in all its stages and conditions is precious to God, we as a congregation will be united and untiring in our efforts to protect the lives of the unborn from abortion, as well as "to bring assistance, comfort, and care to pregnant women in need and to those who have been victimized by abortion, even as we stand resolutely against the corrupt and degrading notion that it can somehow be in the best interests of women to submit to the deliberate killing of their unborn children. Our message is, and ever shall be, that the just, humane, and truly Christian answer to problem pregnancies is for all of us to love and care for mother and child alike."

We will insistently call on those who have been entrusted with temporal power to fulfill the first responsibility of government: to protect the weak, the vulnerable,

the disabled and the dependent against violent attack, and to do so with no favoritism, partiality, or discrimination. The Bible calls upon us to defend those who cannot defend themselves and to speak for those who cannot themselves speak. We will be ready to defend and speak for the unborn, the disabled, and the dependent.

Marriage

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:18, 21-24 (NASU)

“In Scripture, the creation of man and woman, and their one-flesh union as husband and wife, is the crowning achievement of God's creation. In the transmission of life and the nurturing of children, men and women joined as spouses are given the great honor of being partners with God Himself. Marriage then, is the first institution of human society - indeed it is the institution on which all other human institutions have their foundation. In the Christian tradition we refer to marriage as ‘holy matrimony’ to signal the fact that it is an institution ordained by God, and blessed by Christ in his participation at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. In the Bible, God Himself blesses and holds marriage in the highest esteem.

Vast human experience confirms that marriage is the original and most important institution for sustaining the health, education, and welfare of all persons in a society. Where marriage is honored, and where there is a flourishing marriage culture, everyone benefits - the spouses themselves, their children, and the communities and societies in which they live. Where the marriage culture begins to erode, social pathologies of every sort quickly manifest themselves.

Unfortunately, we have witnessed over the course of the past several decades a serious erosion of the marriage culture in our own country. Perhaps the most telling and alarming indicator is the out-of-wedlock birth rate. Less than fifty years ago, it was under 5 percent. Today it is over 40 percent.

Our society, and particularly its poorest and most vulnerable sectors, where the out-of-wedlock birth rate is much higher even than the national average, is paying a huge price in delinquency, drug abuse, crime, incarceration, hopelessness, and despair. Other indicators are widespread non-marital sexual cohabitation and a devastatingly high rate of divorce.”

Therefore, First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa will continue to uphold and support the biblical institution of marriage. We will do everything we can to strengthen families and restore a sense of the profound beauty, mystery, and holiness of the institution of marriage. We will only perform marriages, or allow marriages to be performed in First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa, that follow the biblical marriage relationship between one man and one woman. We will also follow the biblical admonition that Christian marriage is intended to be between a man and woman that have both committed their lives to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We will also only perform marriages, or allow marriages to be performed in First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa, between one man and one woman who have been willing to receive pre-marital counseling that deals with what marriage is, what it requires, and why it is worth the commitment and sacrifices made by faithful spouses.

In an effort to restore a sound, biblical, and healthy marriage culture, First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa will refuse to redefine marriage or recognize and/or perform same-sex or multiple partner marriages.

“We acknowledge that there are those who are inclined towards homosexual conduct and relationships, just as there are those who are inclined towards other forms of immoral conduct. We have compassion for those so inclined; we respect them as human beings possessing profound, inherent, and equal dignity; and we pay tribute to the men and women who strive, often with little assistance, to resist the temptation to yield to desires that they, no less than we, regard as wayward. We stand with them, even when they falter. We, no less than they, are sinners who have fallen short of God's intention for our lives. We, no less than they, are in constant need of God's patience, love, and forgiveness. We call on the entire Christian community to resist sexual immorality, and at the same time refrain from disdainful condemnation of those who yield to it. Our rejection of sin, though resolute, must never become the rejection of sinners. For every sinner, regardless of the sin, is loved by God, who seeks not our destruction but rather the conversion of our hearts. Jesus calls all who wander from the path of virtue to ‘a more excellent way.’ As His disciples we will reach out in love to assist all who hear the call and wish to answer it.

We further acknowledge that there are sincere people who disagree with us, and with the teaching of the Bible and Christian tradition, on questions of sexual morality and the nature of marriage. Some who enter into same-sex relationships no doubt regard their unions as truly marital. They fail to understand, however, that marriage is made possible by the sexual complementarity of man and woman, and that the comprehensive, multi-level sharing of life that marriage includes bodily unity of the sort that unites husband and wife biologically as one. This is because the body is no mere extrinsic instrument of the human person, but truly part of the personal reality of the human being. Human beings are not merely centers of consciousness or emotion, or minds, or spirits, inhabiting non-personal bodies. The human person is a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit. Marriage is what one man and one woman establish when, forsaking all others and pledging lifelong commitment, they found a sharing of life at every level of being - the biological, the emotional, the dispositional, the rational, the spiritual - on a commitment that is sealed, completed, and actualized by loving sexual intercourse in which the spouses become one flesh, not in some merely metaphorical sense, but by fulfilling together the behavioral conditions of procreation.”

“And so it is out of love (not “hatred”) and prudent concern for the common good (not “prejudice”), that we pledge to labor ceaselessly to preserve the legal definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman and to rebuild the marriage culture. How could we, as Christians and as a church, do otherwise? The Bible teaches that marriage is a central part of God's creation covenant. Indeed, the union of husband and wife mirrors the bond between Christ and his church. And so just as Christ was willing, out of love, to give Himself up for the church in complete sacrifice, we are lovingly willing to make whatever sacrifices are required of us for the sake of the inestimable treasure that is marriage.”

Religious Liberty

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” Matthew 22:21 (NIV)

“The right to religious freedom has its foundation in the example of Christ Himself and in the very dignity of the human person created in the image of God - a dignity, as our founders proclaimed, inherent in every human being, and knowable by all in the exercise of right reason.

Christians confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Immunity from religious coercion is the cornerstone of an unconstrained conscience. No one should be compelled to embrace any religion against his will, nor should persons of faith be forbidden to worship God according to the dictates of conscience or to

express freely and publicly their deeply held religious convictions. What is true for individuals applies to religious communities (churches) as well.”

“In recent decades a growing body of case law has paralleled the decline in respect for religious values in the media and political leadership, resulting in restrictions on the free exercise of religion. We view this as an ominous development, not only because of its threat to the individual liberty guaranteed to every person, regardless of his or her faith, but because the trend also threatens the common welfare and the culture of freedom on which our system of republican government is founded. Restrictions on the freedom of conscience or the ability to hire people of one's own faith or conscientious moral convictions for religious institutions, for example, undermine the viability of the intermediate structures of society, the essential buffer against the overweening authority of the state.”

First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa “takes seriously the biblical admonition to respect and obey those in authority. We believe in law and in the rule of law. We recognize the duty to comply with laws whether we happen to like them or not, unless the laws are gravely unjust or require those subject to them to do something unjust or otherwise immoral. The biblical purpose of law is to preserve order and serve justice and the common good; yet laws that are unjust - and especially laws that purport to compel citizens to do what is unjust - undermine the common good, rather than serve it.

Going back to the earliest days of the church, Christians have refused to compromise their proclamation of the gospel. In Acts 4, the apostles Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching. Their answer was, *‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’* Acts 4:19-20 (NIV)”

“Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required.” Therefore, because we honor justice and the common good, we will not comply with any edict that purports to compel First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa to participate in, or support abortion; nor will we bend to any rule purporting to force First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, perform same-sex or multiple partner marriages, or allow the performance of same-sex or multiple partner marriages in First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa. We will also not comply with any edict that purports to compel First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa and/or any ministers of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa to refrain from proclaiming the

truth in any medium, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family.

If the time comes that First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa must choose between loyalty to the state verses loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Word, let it be known by all that we will choose loyalty to Jesus Christ and His Word and His Kingdom. As the apostles went on to say in the fifth chapter of Acts, "*We must obey God rather than men!*" Acts 5:29 (NIV)

- Quotations, other than Scriptures, are taken from the *Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience* released on November 20, 2009.