

Summer 2013



a restored hope network
member ministry

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First Stone Ministries' Position on Advocating for Marriage

(This statement was taken in part, and used by permission from the Restored Hope Network "Position on Advocating for Marriage".)

First Stone Ministries, along with Restored Hope Network, upholds the original definition of marriage as understood through Scripture and the history of humanity: one man committed for one woman for the sake of the children they create and/or will influence through their marriage.

Supporting this definition has become necessary in light of recent efforts to alter it to include homosexual unions. In January of 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the USA to legalize 'gay marriage'; since then, activists have sought to normalize 'gay marriage' by encouraging court and legislative decisions, and by convincing the public that changing the definition of marriage is an expression of justice for homosexuals.

First Stone Ministries and Restored Hope Network declares that 'gay marriage' is no marriage at all but a counterfeit that actually promotes injustice.

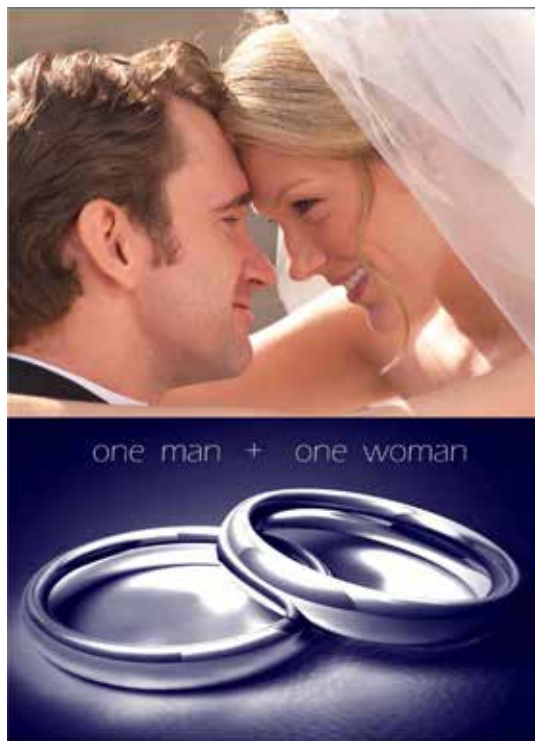
We contend that marriage was designed by God and upheld by the governments of the earth to promote 'the common good.' That design, as revealed by nature, and described in Scripture in the creation of Eve

from Adam and the reuniting of the two as one-flesh (Gen. 1 and 2), constitutes our ministries' understanding of God's intention for marriage.¹

Man needs woman and woman needs man. Neither two men nor two women can create a sexual whole; the one gender possesses what the other gender needs. In giving complementary gifts, one gender balances and draws out the other in a manner that creates a whole. Such wholeness releases 'goods' that benefit all, especially the children most influenced by it². Justice for children involves one man committed to one woman for their sake.

At the center of this understanding of marriage are two people who seal their relationship with a generative act. That not only unites them but also orients them toward children. Though one need not procreate to be married, marriage is defined by the act that is essential to the creating of children.

Becoming 'one-flesh' unites man and woman for life; it also includes them to bring up their children together. That is why both God and state encourage norms of monogamy and



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fidelity in marriage.³ Both uphold the dignity of each spouse, and of the child who needs a mother and a father in order to thrive.⁴

First Stone Ministries and Restored Hope Network believes that the dignity of man, woman, and child depends upon the willingness of both spouses to make and keep a vow of marital fidelity. 'Gay marriage' challenges such dignity by normalizing what is now described as 'monogamish': the trend of some same-gender 'marrieds' to aspire to emotional intimacy with one party but to engage sexually with others.⁵ In that way, redefining marriage weakens the essential boundary of sexual commitment, a distortion most harmful to the children subject to a parent's multiple partnerships.⁶

We contend that the state should support the true definition of marriage. Such a definition helps promote the common good, which is justice for all. That applies to children who need both a mother and father, and to gay-identified persons who benefit from the truth that eroticized friendships can never approximate marriage. The state serves its citizens well by upholding the original intention and definition of marriage. Generations-to-come will take cues from the culture and will derive (in part) their view of marriage from its legal definition. The state's conception of marriage matters to all.

As a Christ-centered network of ministries of restoration for persons seeking to overcome sexual problems, especially homosexual ones, RHN realizes the limits of the law. While the state can look out for the common good and restrain evil, it cannot redeem lives. Only Jesus can. Yet we realize that our fellow humanity will be impacted by redefining marriage. Legalizing 'gay marriage' will further damage marriage and hurt those influenced by it.

Caitlin Flanagan writes: 'No other single force is causing as much measurable hardship in this country as the collapse of marriage.'⁷ Redefining marriage contributes to this collapse and will result in more human brokenness, especially in the lives of children who are subject to adult moral decisions and the laws that influence them.

Restored Hope Conference Report



The Restored Hope Conference was a wonderful hope-filled event here in Oklahoma City. It went really well and we saw God do some amazing things in the lives that attended!

The entire staff of First Stone Ministries, their spouses and many volunteers hosted this event. We were honored to have the favor of the staff and community of believers at Cherokee Hills Baptist Church. They provided a wonderful facility and environment to host this very relevant conference in light of our culture.

We thus refuse to acknowledge the validity of 'gay marriage'; it does not originate in God's design for humanity but in a misbegotten justice that disrupts the common good.

Corruption begins with a failure to call things by their proper names. 'Gay marriage' is a misnomer that citizens of the state and church would be wise to refuse. Marriage belongs only to one man committed to one woman for the good of all.

First Stone Ministries and the Restored Hope Network also realize that 'gay marriage' is a symptom of the heterosexual immorality that preceded it: extramarital sex, adultery, pornography, divorce, and abortion, to name a few. We contest whatever is hostile to marriage. Our pastoral efforts to restore those broken by sexual sin are the foundation for our social policy on marriage.⁸ We are committed to make every effort to ensure the integrity of this most important relationship.

¹ Dr. Robert Gagnon, "Why 'Gay Marriage' is Wrong," July 2004, pp. 1, 2. <http://www.robgagnon.net/homopresbytodayarticle.htm>

² Dr. John Haas, "Marriage as a Common Good," Theology of the Body and Sexual Ethics lecture, June 29th, 2011.

³ Dr. Robert George, Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, "What is Marriage?" pp. 1-23; Dr. Robert George, "Law and Moral Purpose," First Things, January 2008, pp. 5,6.

⁴ Dr. Mark Regnerus, New Family Structures Study, University of Texas, 2012.

⁵ Mark Oppenheimer, "Married with Infidelities," New York Times Magazine, July 3rd 2011, pp. 21-27.

⁶ Dr. Mark Regnerus...

⁷ Caitlin Flanagan, "Why Marriage Matters," Time Magazine, July 13th, 2009, p. 46.

⁸ Andrew Comiskey, "Compassion and Justice: Why We Stand for Marriage in the Public Square," Kingdom and Culture, June 2011, pp. 1, 2.

Restored Hope Network (www.restoredhopenetwork.org) 



The Restored Hope Board and Membership voted in two positional papers: one was on marriage – “Why Restored Hope Network Advocates for Marriage” and the other on homosexuality – “Transformation of Persons with Same-sex Attraction: Becoming Who We Are”. It was ironic that Alan Chambers and the Board of Exodus selected the first night of their conference as well as our leadership day to announce the closure of Exodus. The Restored Hope Network is needed now more than ever to give a biblically-orthodox view on the issues of sexual ethics and homosexuality. The position papers and doctrinal statement help bring a more sure foundation for this new network.

The week of the conference started with two days for the board of directors to meet and plan for how to expand Restored Hope Network’s influence and message during the coming year. Stephen Black, First Stone Ministries’ Executive Director, serves on the Restored Hope board of directors as Vice-Chairman. There was much needed conversation around how to distinguish our message from that of emergent ministry, Exodus International’s message of gay affirmation. First Stone and all the other ministries in Restored



RHN Board



RHN Membership Leaders

Hope withdrew membership from Exodus last year due to concerns over Exodus’ increasingly-terrible theology. We found Exodus’ message to be less and less hopeful for those who desired transformation in their identity and sexuality and more and more accepting of homosexual relationships as appropriate for Christ’s followers. It is unfortunate that the demise of Exodus has come by being shipwrecked on the shores of gay Christian affirmation. The day after the RHN Board meetings, during our leadership meetings, Exodus would officially announce its closing and apologize for harming people by ever carrying the message of sexual redemption and transformation. This news was heartbreaking but confirmed the leadership of God over First Stone and other ministries who formed the Restored Hope Network. Thank God that those impacted negatively by Exodus’ compromise now have Restored Hope Network to look to for the truth of the Gospel, which is the very power of God that

brings transformation for EVERYONE who believes (Romans 1:18)!

The staff of First Stone spoke at the conference in workshops and gave amazing testimonies to God’s outstanding grace. The conference keynotes were outstanding and we are looking forward to making those messages available in audio and video in the next few weeks on the RHN website.

A few praise reports from our conference:

We facilitated several days for ministry leaders to be equipped to better carry the heart of God to the sexually and relationally broken. I really felt those days went well and that leaders walked away more equipped to do the work of ministry.

One young man attending the conference came and talked with Andrew Franklin about some un-forgiveness issues he was having related to his dad. They discussed Matthew 18, the parable of the unforgiving servant, and particularly the beginning of the parable where the King begins by taking an account of what is owed him. After talking, they left for dinner break. Immediately after the dinner break, this young man found Andrew and began talking to him with a new light in his eyes. He explained that immediately after the discussion, he’d gone back to his hotel and began to write out the sins his father had committed against him; what he felt His father “owed” him. After writing the list, He invited the forgiveness of Jesus to flood over every one of those specific “debts.” He asked Jesus to provide the forgiveness he felt incapable of extending. And, beaming, this young man told the truth about the breakthrough he felt in his heart as he released those offenses to Jesus – he said he finally felt able to fully receive from Jesus at the conference!

During a general session on Saturday, an invitation was offered for people to give their lives to Jesus for the first time or to renew their covenant with Jesus if they had run away from that. We know a few people gave their lives to Jesus for the first time, and several others came forward to do business with God! How cool that there is celebration happening in heaven because of the repentance that occurred at this conference!

There were several people in attendance who had attended other national Exodus conferences and came away relieved of the restored HOPE that was given, the amazing worship, the clear Biblical teachings in workshops and keynote addresses and hope-filled testimonies. One lady said: “This was better than any other Exodus Conference that I’ve attended.” Another man said: “Restored Hope lived up to its name this weekend, truly my hope has been restored, thank you so much for being faithful to the truth that really does transform!”



When Did Idolatry Become Compatible with Christianity? Why It Matters.

Used with permission by Joe Carter on March 27, 2013, Gospel Coalition

The Story: Yesterday, March 26, 2013, during oral arguments in a landmark Supreme Court case regarding same-sex marriage, Associate Justice Antonin Scalia and pro-gay marriage advocate Theodore Olson had a discussion about the Constitution that sheds light on an issue within the church.

The Background: In the oral argument yesterday for *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, Justice Scalia repeatedly questioned Ted Olson on when same-sex marriage became unconstitutional. From the transcript:

JUSTICE SCALIA: I'm curious, when—when did — when did it become unconstitutional to exclude homosexual couples from marriage? 1791? 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted? Sometimes — some time after Baker, where we said it didn't even raise a substantial Federal question? When — when — when did the law become this?

MR. OLSON: When — may I answer this in the form of a rhetorical question? When did it become unconstitutional to prohibit interracial marriages? When did it become unconstitutional to assign children to separate schools.

JUSTICE SCALIA: It's an easy question, I think, for that one. At — at the time that the Equal Protection Clause was adopted. That's absolutely true. But don't give me a question to my question. When do you think it became unconstitutional? Has it always been unconstitutional? . . .

MR. OLSON: It was constitutional when we as a culture determined that sexual orientation is a characteristic of individuals that they cannot control, and that that

JUSTICE SCALIA: I see. When did that happen? When did that happen?

MR. OLSON: There's no specific date in time. This is an evolutionary cycle.

Why It Matters: For Christians, this is an era of historical significance—and not just because of the marriage issue. While defending the institution of marriage is an important and worthy goal, the same-sex marriage debate has uncovered a question that is similar to Justice Scalia's: When did it become acceptable for Christians to embrace and endorse homosexual behavior?

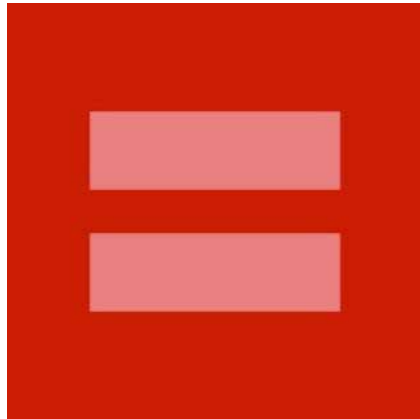
Like Mr. Olson, I would say there is no specific date in time. It was the result of an evolutionary cycle in which the church became more accepting of rampant idolatry.

At its root, the issue has more to do with idolatry than marriage, since same-sex marriage could not have advanced in America if believers had not exchanged the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the God of faux-love, cultural acceptance, and open theism.

The idolatry of Christian same-sex marriage advocates takes two general forms. The first group still recognizes the authority of God's Word, or at least still believes in the general concept of "sin." They will freely admit that, like other types of fornication, same-gender sex is forbidden in the Bible, and even excluded by Jesus' clear and concise definition of marriage. Yet despite this understanding they still choose to embrace same-sex marriage because they have made an idol of American libertarian freedom. They have replaced Jesus' commandment—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"—with the guiding motto of the neopagan religion of Wicca, "Do what you will, so long as it harms none."

In endorsing laws based solely on the secular liberal-libertarian conception of freedom (at least those that produce no obvious self-harm), they are doing the very opposite of what Jesus called them to do: They are hating their neighbors, including their gay and lesbian neighbors. You do not love your neighbor by encouraging them to engage in actions that invoke God's wrath (Psalm 5:4-5; Romans 1:18). As Christians we may be required to tolerate ungodly behavior, but the moment we begin to endorse the same then we too have become suppressers of the truth. You cannot love your neighbor and want to see them excluded from the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5:5).

The second group has completely rejected the authority of Scripture and embraced the idol of open theism, a god who changes his mind over time. Not surprisingly, this god seems to change his mind in ways that comport exactly with the secular morality of twenty-first century America. A prime example of this embrace of a progressive, open deity is found in a comment by former evangelical pastor Rob Bell. Bell recently said:




Symbol used in social media by many promoting gay marriage.

“What we’re seeing now, in this day, is god pulling us ahead into greater and greater affirmation and acceptance of our gay brothers and sisters . . . and we’re realizing that god made some of us one way and some of us another and it can be a beautiful thing.”

Bell goes on to clarify that what he advocates is not an affirmation and acceptance of repentant sinners, but affirmation and acceptance of their sin. Bell has rejected the God of the Bible, a God that is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and embraced a false idol that tells him that what is considered sin changes based on the fickle attitudes of Americans.

Bell, like other same-sex advocates, has moved beyond the temptation and struggle we all have with idolatry and have boldly set up their idols for all to see. Yesterday, on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, many Christians displayed the red equals sign—a symbol of gay rights and “marriage equality”—so that their friends, family, and followers would see that they stood with the forces opposed to God’s Word.

For too long those of us in the church have grumbled to ourselves or remained silent about this open idolatry. We fear that if we point out too clearly or forcefully that you can’t both serve God and endorse sin that they may leave our congregations. We seem more concerned with losing the volunteer for the Sunday morning nursery or the regular check in the offering plate than we do with the souls of those in open and unrepentant rebellion against God. We seem more worried about the judgment of the kids in the youth ministry than we do with the judgment of a wrathful and holy God. We are so troubled by the thought that same-sex advocates will fall away from the faith that we fail to see that they’ve already rejected the faith of historic, orthodox Christianity and replaced it with an idolatrous heresy—one that is as destructive and hateful as any that has come before.

What is needed is courage in speaking the truth: We cannot love our neighbor and tolerate idolatry and unrepentant rebellion against God. We cannot continue with the “go along to get along” mentality that is leading those we love to destruction. We must speak the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31) and accept the fact that those who have fallen away may not ever return. We must choose this day whom we will serve. Will we stand with the only wise God or with the foolish idol-makers of same-sex marriage? 

Joe Carter is an editor for The Gospel Coalition and the co-author of How to Argue Like Jesus: Learning Persuasion from History’s Greatest Communicator.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE: *raising up partners*




Many exciting opportunities have evolved for First Stone over the past several months. First and foremost, First Stone has volunteered to host the second annual Restored Hope Network National Conference this June. Our staff and volunteer leaders will be

working with other national leaders to ensure that many are impacted and that all events run smoothly. This will certainly require some time and resources, but we are excited for the challenge.

This month has found Stephen in Spokane, WA presenting a weekend series on sexual redemption and Laura Leigh in California meeting with other healing leaders to explore how to better minister in this area. Many have spoken that First Stone is being given a more national platform, and this is proving true. We are praising God for expanding our influence and favor in the Church.

Another development we are excited about is an opportunity to acquire more office space in our current location. We will be nearly doubling our square footage, meaning we will be able to do much more discipleship, small group, and teaching ministry in our Midtown offices, freeing us up from leaning so heavily on other locations. We are thrilled about this opportunity, even though it will mean a significant increase in our monthly office rent and expenses.

As our Church becomes more and more tested in the area of sexual ethics, we anticipate that more believers will be seeking answers to all the confusion being promulgated in our culture. The Church will need to be further equipped to give answers to God’s true intent for our sexuality and relationships.

Since God has opened up this opportunity to acquire office space that will increase our capacity to minister, would you prayerfully consider increasing or beginning a monthly gift to enable us to maintain this space? **Would you consider giving \$50, \$75, or \$100 each month to allow us to continue ministering to the sexually and relationally broken in our city, state, and nation?** May God abundantly bless each of you as you sow into eternity! 

FIRST STONE MINISTRIES STAFF INFORMATION

See www.firststone.org for individual testimonies, enlightening articles and accompanying information.

All staff may be reached by phone at 405.236.4673 or email:

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FIRST STONE MINISTRIES SUPPORT GROUP INFORMATION

See www.firststone.org for
ONLINE Registrations and Information.

LIVING WATERS

Living Waters is an in-depth, Christ-centered program for people seeking healing in areas of sexual and relational brokenness. A healing, teaching and discipleship study that addresses the reality - we are all broken in our ability to love others well. The goal of First Stone Ministries' support groups are to lay a foundation for relational and sexual wholeness in our lives. Living Waters is on Thursday evenings from 7-10pm.



Living Waters 2013-2014 will begin on October 10th. Online applications are now being accepted through October 1st. Shortened link to our Living Waters page: http://bit.ly/fsm_lw

PARENTS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP



First Stone hosts a group of parents and family members who meet together on a regular basis for support in loving their loved ones who are gay. If you find yourself needing the support of others who are also dealing with this in their families, please consider the Parents, Family and Friends group. Meetings take place on the third Friday of each month, from 7-9:30pm.

If you are interested in joining any of the support groups please contact our offices at 405-236-4673, or email: info@firststone.org.

FIRST STONE MINISTRIES INTERCESSION TEAM

If you would like to partner with FSM in prayer and receive monthly prayer updates, please email Verla-Marie: verlamarie@firststone.org

announcing:


Andrew & Jordyn Franklin

april 6, 2013



I was a little surprised at just how happy I was on my wedding day. I certainly didn't expect to be sad, but as I look back on our wedding photos, I've thought, "I look like a crazy person!" Picture after picture, Jordyn and I are beaming, laughing, celebrating.

It certainly isn't that we took lightly our marriage vows or the weight of the covenant into which we entered. We had both spent years of our lives doing the hard work of repentance, readying ourselves for the "more" we struggled to believe God had for us. But both of us have come from such broken backgrounds with regard to relationships, that I think we felt a bit overwhelmed at the kindness of God to bring us into this marriage that feels....well, Clean. Healing. Holy. Joyful. Difficult. Refining. Good. Throughout our still-young relationship, we've seen Jesus give back things the enemy has stolen, all the "the years the locusts have eaten" (Joel 2:25). We certainly haven't arrived, but we have experienced him returning us to a youthful, joyful celebration of His love and mercy, lifting the heaviness of unclean relating and the rejection, insecurity and pain that inevitably follows.

Since the wedding day, as I've reflected on that joy I experienced, I am reminded of several passages of Scripture that speak to our future union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 describes how we "patiently anticipate the day when our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, is revealed...on that day, He will consider you faultless." Jude 24 points us to "Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and cause you to stand in His glorious presence, blameless and with great joy". My laugh-happy wedding day is only a dim image! Can you imagine the joy we will feel when all our preparation is complete for the Wedding Supper of the Lamb? How pure will be our joy, how overwhelmed our hearts with His Love as He receives the reward for His suffering! I look forward to THAT day, even as we glory in joyful memories of our wedding day, in which we were able to celebrate all Christ has done, and all He is going to do in and through us. We are grateful for His beautiful gift of marriage! 



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The Board of Restored Hope Network's Response to the Announced Closure of Exodus


We, the Board of Restored Hope Network, grieve the decision of Alan Chambers and the board of Exodus to close down this venerable organization. It feels like the unnecessary death of a dear friend. It would have been better for them to have stepped aside and allowed others to carry on the message of hope for transformed lives. Although the timing of the news was a surprise to many, the shutting down of Exodus is the not-unexpected outcome of a cheap grace theology that severs the confession of Christ as Savior from the confession of Christ as Lord.

While some falsely proclaim that a transformed life is optional for Christians, the united witness of Jesus and the writers of Scripture are clear: In God's grace true saving faith results in a life of holiness and sexual purity. Thankfully God does not leave his people without a witness to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The Restored Hope Network was formed in 2012 to provide just such a witness. We welcome all those cast adrift by recent events to know that God is still faithful.

"I am so thankful that Restored Hope Network exists at this time to continue the message of transformation and new life in Christ."
--Frank Worthen, one of the founders of Exodus (1976) and of the Restored Hope Network (2012)

Founded in July 2012, Restored Hope is a membership governed network dedicated to restoring hope to those broken by sexual and relational sin, especially those impacted by homosexuality. We proclaim that Jesus Christ has life-changing power for all who submit to Christ as Lord; we also seek to equip His church to impart that transformation. 

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