

Our Statement on Marriage

To the Government of the United States of America

From the consistory (pastor and elders) of the Oceanside United Reformed Church

August 4th in the year of our Lord 2015

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”¹—
the one true God whom alone is “King of kings and Lord of lords” over all nations;
from whom all executive, legislative, and judicial power comes; whose kingdom
already came, is coming, and will come to consummate all things in heaven and on
earth.²

In the long history of God’s people there have been occasions when they
have been called upon to speak to their civil rulers. The church, as the primary
manifestation of the kingdom of God, is the place from which Almighty God
speaks to not only his peculiar people, but to all peoples everywhere—including
civil governments. It is not the calling of the institutional church, whether local or
catholic (“universal”), to legislate as civil representatives, interpret legislation as
civil judges, or apply legislation as civil executives. But it is our calling to be the
prophetic voice of God in the world, following the examples of prophets and
apostles of old.³ We are “the pillar and foundation of the truth”⁴ concerning God
and his relationship to the world. In response to the Supreme Court of the United

¹ Matthew 28:19

² Revelation 19:16; Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 3:2; Matthew 6:10; Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

³ E.g., 2 Samuel 12; Isa. 13-27; Mark 6; Acts 4-7

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:15

States' 5-4 decision to declare same-sex "marriage" as a right in all fifty states (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015), the leadership of the Oceanside United Reformed Church is compelled to speak the truth of the Word of God in love.

A Plea

We call upon you, leaders of our government—Mr. President, Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker of the House Boehner, and Chief Justice John Roberts—to repent of approving same-sex "marriage" and do all in your power to repeal it.

We appeal to you to take up the Word of God, which describes your duties and responsibilities. In your ideal capacity, you are foster fathers and nursing mothers to the church.⁵ As such fathers and mothers, we have a deep honor for your persons and positions of office.⁶ Into such high offices God himself has instituted you over this nation as his servants for good and as punishers of wrongdoers.⁷ Because your task is so weighty, God commands us to offer for you constant "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings."⁸ Our prayers for you are in the same vein as Tertullian (155-240) once wrote of Christian prayer for the Roman Emperor, whom persecuted Christians:

Looking up to Him, we Christians—with hands extended, because they are harmless, with head bare because we are not ashamed, without a prayer leader because we pray from the heart—constantly beseech Him on behalf

⁵ Isaiah 49:23; cf. the Belgic Confession (1561), article 36; Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), ch. 23.3; Westminster Larger Catechism (1647), Q&A 191

⁶ Exodus 20:12

⁷ Romans 13:1-4

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:1

of all emperors. We ask for them long life, undisturbed power, security at home, brave armies, a faithful Senate, an upright people, a peaceful world, and everything for which a man or Caesar prays.⁹

We pray the words of Jesus for you: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”¹⁰ And our prayer for our entire nation is Jesus’ as well, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”¹¹

What God Commands

Why are we calling on you to repent and to repeal same-sex “marriage?”

The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us in his Word “from the beginning” of creation God is the author of marriage, having created humanity and having “made them male and female.”¹² Our Lord affirms, therefore, that from beginning to end, the Bible has a clear and consistent teaching about marriage: marriage is a faithful lifelong union of one man and one woman.

We read in the beginning: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”¹³ Having created the human race as male and female, God commanded this male and this female to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”¹⁴ Because it was “not good that the man should be alone,” God said, “I will make him a helper fit for him.”¹⁵ And in giving this one woman to this one man, he brought them together into a faithful and

⁹ *Apology*, ch. 30

¹⁰ Luke 23:34

¹¹ Matthew 6:10

¹² Matthew 19:4-7

¹³ Genesis 1:27

¹⁴ Genesis 1:28

¹⁵ Genesis 2:18

lifelong union: “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”¹⁶

Jesus re-affirmed this creational structure of marriage, saying, “from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”¹⁷

Paul also spoke of such marriage between man and woman, husband and wife, appealing to the original creation as well as saying it was significant of Jesus Christ’s relationship to his people: “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”¹⁸

The Holy Scriptures nowhere recognize with Divine approval any other form of marriage other than that between one man and one woman. In fact, Jesus not only re-affirms the Old Testament’s teaching on marriage but also it’s teaching on sexual immorality, including homosexuality. In his own words,

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.¹⁹

¹⁶ Genesis 2:24

¹⁷ Mark 10:6–9

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:24–25

¹⁹ Matt. 5:17–19

Homosexual activity, like all sexual immorality, is a violation of the moral will of God.²⁰ Even more, though, homosexuality is an overturning of God's created order by humans who have rejected God and put themselves in his place.

Therefore it is a sign of God's wrath being poured out upon a society:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.²¹

Therefore we plead with you to take heed, to acknowledge *Obergefell v. Hodges* as grievous sin, and to do everything in your power to repeal it. Because marriage is an institution of God and because you are God's servants over our

²⁰ Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26–32; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10

²¹ Romans 1:18–32

nation, you have an interest in marriage and a delegated authority from God to protect its sanctity.

What God Promises

But God not only thunders his Law to us all in his Word, he also sweetly whispers the Gospel or good news of Jesus Christ to us sinners. Homosexuality is not only a sin that must be repented of, but like all sin, one from which, by God's grace, sinners can be rescued.²²

As Romans 1 above makes clear, homosexuality is merely the symptom of a much larger problem: our sins have separated us from our Creator.²³ In particular, our sin is idolatry, which is “worship[ing] and serv[ing] the creature rather than the Creator.”²⁴ And what creature-idol do we as Americans worship? Self. In our self-worship we are lost and in desperate need of Jesus Christ.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty [i.e., unrepentant], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”²⁵

This “God so loved the world” of sinners, which you and we are, “that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal

²² 1 Corinthians 6:9–10

²³ Isaiah 59:2

²⁴ Romans 1:25

²⁵ Exodus 34:6–7

life.”²⁶

Therefore it does matter who you are, from where you have come, what position you have, how much or how little you have, what your political views are, or to whom you are attracted, God invites all to hear his Word, to repent of sin, to be forgiven, and to live alongside other sinners saved by grace who are being transformed more and more to be like Jesus Christ. God “is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance;” God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”²⁷ This is the greatest act of love we can show you and our fellow human beings: proclaiming that Jesus saves sinners. We say this as fellow-sinners, who like the “Prodigal Son,” were once “dead,” but are now “alive;” who once were “lost,” but have been “found.”²⁸ We say as those who have found freedom from the sin of self and true and lasting freedom in the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose service is perfect freedom.

A Protest

We also respectfully write in protest. The Oceanside United Reformed Church, in common with the United Reformed Churches in North America, as well as Christian churches in all times and in all places, affirms that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God to humanity. They contain all things necessary for the salvation of sinners; they are our final authority and

²⁶ John 3:16

²⁷ 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4

²⁸ Luke 15:32

unchangeable standard for Christian doctrine and living. Concerning marriage, they unambiguously proclaim that marriage is a faithful lifelong union of one man and one woman.

Therefore, we deny and protest that human beings, whether individuals, entire populations, or civil magistrates, have the ability or the authorization to re-define marriage in any way at odds with the revealed will of God. Marriage is pre-political. Marriage is not a social construct. Marriage is a creation ordinance—it is a part of the fabric of the world God has made, and because of this, it is part of that natural law on the heart of all humanity that evidences itself in the overwhelming transcultural consensus on the nature of marriage throughout human history. Regardless of new social and political sensibilities, there is simply no such thing as same-sex “marriage.” To say so is hubris—an arrogance that considers oneself wiser than God in reinventing an institution the one true God created and revealed to humanity and arrogance toward all of previous human history. No matter how much authority you may have, you do not have the right to declare an ordinance of God. As Christians we abhor the casual disregard for the revealed will of the Creator of all things whom gave marriage between one man and one woman. Our highest Court may have had its say for now, but there is a still higher court and a greater Judge before whom we all must stand one day. And in that court the Judge and his Law does not rely on any ideological fads or emerging cultural consensus for its legitimacy.

Therefore, when any government of any nation, including the one we love, oversteps its rightful authority, “we must obey God rather than men.”²⁹ We have counted the cost of following Jesus Christ and are prepared for whatever is coming our way. Those who have lobbied for this day to come have largely won the national debate by successfully equating in the public mind opposition to same sex-marriage with the terrible poison of racism, so that to stand for God’s truth is to be labeled a “bigot” and “extremist.” We know that we may be accused of “hate speech.” We do not hate anyone. Our Lord commands “love your neighbor as yourself” and “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”³⁰

In the long history of God’s people, both Israel in the Old Testament and now his international church, we have known what it is to be marginalized and to be in the minority. Moses “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.”³¹ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the image of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, were thrown into a furnace to die, but lived.³² Daniel prayed publicly three times a day, knowing that the Median King Darius proclaimed that prayer must be made to him.³³ John the Baptist was beheaded for speaking the truth to King Herod.³⁴ Paul suffered for his testimony about Jesus Christ being Savior and Lord of the world: five times he received thirty-nine lashes, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, and

²⁹ Acts 5:29

³⁰ Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Matthew 5:44

³¹ Hebrews 11:26

³² Daniel 3

³³ Daniel 6

³⁴ Mark 6

he had to be let down in a basket in a window of the city wall of Damascus.³⁵ After the apostles died we were called atheists, cannibals, and incestuous by the cultural elites of the Roman Empire. We were the “extremists” who brought upon the Empire the wrath of the gods because we would not simply offer a mere pinch of incense to the statue of *Roma*, the personification of the all-powerful State.

Like our Lord, who “suffered outside the gate,” we are willing to “go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” because of our commitment to his truth.³⁶ In the face of penalties, financial or otherwise, many will sadly be quick to offer the meager pinch of incense, twisting the Scriptures “to their own destruction;”³⁷ but we will not. In the face of persecution, we will say in the spirit of Polycarp (80–155): “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” who under the threat of lions, said, “Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil,” and who under threat of burning at the stake said, “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly.”³⁸ In the words of the Protestant pastor, Guido Brès (1522–1567), to King Philip II of Spain (1527–1598):

But having the fear of God before our eyes, and being in dread of the warning of Jesus Christ, who tells us that He shall forsake us before God and His Father if we deny Him before men, we suffer our backs to be beaten, our tongues to be cut, our mouths to be gagged and our whole body to be

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:24–33

³⁶ Hebrews 13:12–13

³⁷ 2 Peter 3:16

³⁸ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, chapter 9, 11

burnt, for we know that he who would follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself.

Whatever the threat, whatever the reviling, whatever the label, we will turn the other cheek, we will count it a blessing to be “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” knowing that ours “is the kingdom of God” and knowing that “so they persecuted the prophets” before us, and “we will count it all joy...when [we] meet trials of various kinds” knowing “that the testing of [our] faith produces steadfastness.”³⁹ In the words of Martin Luther (1483–1546):

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Our consciences are captive to the Word of God. And on this revelation of God we stand. We can do no other. To our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—be the glory, forever! Amen.

³⁹ Matthew 5:39; Matthew 5:10; Matthew 5:12; James 1:2–3