

Why I Won't Be Signing the Nashville Statement

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On August 29, 2017, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) issued the Nashville Statement. You can read it on their site here (<https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>) or in this PDF version (<https://goo.gl/JPZWUK>). The initial signatories include many prominent leaders from Christian Conservatism/American Evangelicalism. According to its preamble, it was written "in the hope of serving Christ's church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture." Thus, CBMW wrote the statement not just to the Christian community who would, hopefully, understand it in the context of the Gospel and, in fact, all Scripture. It was also written to the public at large, which we must assume is not well-versed in Scripture and internal Christian jargon.

It is not that I don't agree with the barebones affirmations and denials it makes concerning marriage, human sexuality, and transgenderism. Simply put, God did not create humans as sixty-two varieties of gender, but as male and female (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4). He designed marriage to be between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Since it is God who created male and female and God who designed marriage to be between one male and one female, despite whatever the state decides it wants to accept as a marriage, to God, the only real marriage is between one man and one woman, it lasts for life, and sexual activity between people of whatever sex outside of marriage is either adultery or fornication. Yet, while the Bible lists homosexuals as among those who will not inherit God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9), *all* sin disqualifies us from the kingdom, and we are all sinners, "Such were some of you, but you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God" (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

And so I want to explain why I will not sign the Nashville Statement.

1. I see no need for the Nashville Statement. It neither adds anything new to the discussion nor does it even bother to cite Scripture or give logical arguments to support what it says. To use the word that is often found in theological works, it contains no apology; that is, it lacks a formal justification for its position. It merely says, this is what we believe, as if we didn't already know that the signatories held that position. Truly, I wasn't in any danger of thinking that Al Mohler or R.

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C. Sproul or Wayne Grudem or any of the other signatories were about to flip off the high board into a pool of hallucinogens and come out in favor of gay marriage or gender choice (although Grudem did prove himself quite limber on the springboard in 2016) (<https://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2016/10/23/wayne-grudem-backing-trump-again-and-for-good>).

But it's good to know what we believe, you say. Excuse me, but why do you need someone to tell you what you believe? You should know what you believe already. Depending on someone else to tell you what you believe is the first step in cultism. All the Nashville Statement tells us is what the signatories believe, and, as I've already explained, if we know who those signatories are, we knew what they believed already.

2. Related to the above, the Nashville Statement is not written in a way that will change anyone's mind. It is not persuasive. It merely states facts in the manner of the fine print in a legal document. So again, why was it written?

3. I disagree with Al Mohler's assessment that the Nashville Statement is "an expression of love for same-sex attracted people" (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/09/03/i-signed-the-nashville-statement-its-an-expression-of-love-for-same-sex-attracted-people/?utm_term=.c1cb91f71ddb). It simply makes dry, matter-of-fact statements about the sinfulness of homosexuality and transgenderism and closes with a disproportionately cursory Gospel statement given in language that non-Christians are unlikely to understand. This *National Review* article's (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/450981/nashville-mayor-barry-attacks-basic-christian-belief>) claim that the Nashville Statement repeatedly declares God's love is totally baseless. The word "love" is mentioned in the statement only twice: Once when speaking about "the covenant love between Christ and his bride," and again when affirming "our duty to speak the truth in love at all times." "Sin" and "sinful," on the other hand, are found ten times.

4. Basic Christianity is not moralism. The same *National Review* article mentioned above makes the claim that the Nashville Statement is basic Christianity and that it's a moral statement. This is a contradiction in terms. The Nashville Statement may indeed be a moral statement, but it is not basic Christianity. This is basic Christianity: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Yes, there is a brief statement of the Gospel toward the end of the statement, but the Gospel ought to be central to, not peripheral to, any message to the world from leading Christians discussing sin. After all, Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the

Cross is what Christianity is all about. For a group of leading Christians to write a statement to the public about sin and then not abundantly emphasize its remedy is a grievous mistake and a missed opportunity.

5. I don't want to sign a partisan political statement. Let me explain. If the Nashville Statement isn't an apology or detailed justification for the biblical teaching on marriage and human sexuality (and it is far too cursory to be such), and if it isn't an evangelistic message to the gay and transsexual community, then what is it? It is a declaration of principles, otherwise known as a manifesto, otherwise known as a platform statement. In my humble opinion, the Nashville Statement's real purpose may be to put on record the position the signatories hold concerning human sexuality and marriage. It was issued only days after President Donald Trump ordered the Department of Defense to reverse its policy that allowed transgender people to serve openly in the U.S. military. Whatever its intended aim, it sends a message to the current administration, the Congress, and the Republican leadership that this is where we who hold significant sway over a large portion of Republican voters stand; you cave in on these issues at your peril.

6. As a platform statement, the Nashville Statement is thus a throwing down of the gauntlet, a wall of division. It is the stone that even the Scribes and Pharisees were too ashamed to cast at the woman caught in adultery (John 8:7). It is the judgment of those who did not first look in their own eyes (Matthew 7:3-4). It flies in the face of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10: "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable. 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbour's good.... Give no occasion for stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the assembly of God; even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 32-33).

Yes, Jesus cast a sword into the earth dividing all who believe from those who refuse to believe (Matthew 10:34). But He also brings all who will believe into a peaceful, healing, and saving relationship with Himself and all other believers (see "Peace on Earth, or a Sword?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/peace-sword/>). We believers must remember, we stand where we are, not because of our own righteousness, but because of God's great grace given to us in Jesus Christ: "The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Our job is to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15). Romans 1 and 2 speak of the sins of the world, but only does so in giving the historical

background from which Christians have been saved. They should remember from whence they came, and therefore, they should not be judging (Romans 2:1). Paul specifically says he has nothing to do with judging those outside of the Christian assembly (1 Corinthians 5:12). Christians have no commission or right to try to impose moral standards on the world. In other places in the New Testament where sins, including homosexuality, are mentioned, they are descriptions of the way the world is (nothing is said about changing it) and how these behaviours should not be found in the Christian community. We must rightly divide the Word of God and not assume that commands for Christians are to be put upon the world.

7. The Nashville Statement, like so many positions of Christian Conservatism, is a wrong-headed mixing of the kingdom of God with the kingdom of the world (see "Sorting Out the Two Kingdoms") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/two-kingdoms/>). If the state wants to accept marriage between people of the same sex, this has nothing to do with our carrying out the commission Christ has given His followers. Let Caesar define his own laws. The idea that Christians are to impose "God's holy ordinances," to use the language of some, on the world is a complete fiction that only divides and hinders those coming into the kingdom.

So often, pastors use the incident of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11) to point out that Jesus told the woman to "go, and sin no more." But they overlook the fact that Jesus *first* said to her, "Neither do I condemn you." The Christian walk comes *after* salvation.

Jesus ate with sinners. Because He ate with sinners doesn't mean He approved their sin, but He also didn't go to their houses and throw their sins in their faces. In fact, He reserved His criticisms for the legalist, condemning Pharisees who kept bringing up others' sins. Jesus said the prostitutes would be going into God's kingdom before those Pharisees ever would (Matthew 21:31).

When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Matthew 9:11-13

"To repentance" can be translated as "into a change of mind." Repentance is too often mistaken to mean that we must turn around and go the other way before God accepts us. This flies in the face of the fact that our salvation is entirely completed by God through the work of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, the Nashville Statement, from a Christian perspective, is an unnecessary statement, makes no attempt at being persuasive, is not an expression of love, emphasizes moralism above the Gospel, smacks of being a partisan political statement, causes division and misunderstanding rather than healing and understanding, and mixes the kingdom of God with the kingdom of the world and thus hinders the Christian's responsibility to spread the Good News of forgiveness in Christ by introducing the lie that the Christian has the duty to enforce moralism on the world.