
CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION

July/August/September 2014

VOL. 24 NO. 3

Us Only

By Michael J. Brooks

Emmitt was one of the finest Christian men I've ever known — a deacon and a Gideon — but I was never able to convince him that our congregation eating and fellowshiping together was a good thing. I'm not sure if he ever set foot in our fellowship hall. He'd say, "We ought to take that money and feed hungry people."

It was only later that I heard a preacher invent a new adjective when he claimed the Bible was the "eatingest" book in the world since God's people were always celebrating with food. I sometimes jokingly remark that food is the only sin we Baptists can enjoy since we can't drink, smoke, play cards or dance!

I'd have used this unique adjective with Emmitt if I'd known it at the time.

But at least Emmitt's focus was on the larger world outside the four walls of our church.

I heard about a pious church that had a sign on their lawn: "Jesus Only." A prankster removed the first three letters one night so the next morning the sign read, "Us Only." This kind of selfish attitude must never characterize the people of God.

It's true that proper worship lifts our eyes to a world in need.

This is not to say that there's no ministry within the church. Of course there is, and all believers are recipients of such ministry. I think of faithful Bible teachers, children's and youth workers in two Baptist churches who encouraged me in my

formative years. I still name the teachers I had and appreciate how they helped me learn to love the Bible. I also benefited from some wonderful Methodist lay leaders since our community Boy Scout troop was sponsored by their church.

And our churches serve their members through grief ministry, counseling, benevolent offerings and in countless other ways. We mustn't overlook the vital ministry inside the church.

But we remember the famous word of D. L. Moody when he said the world is a sinking ship and the church must save all she can.

In recent months, we've seen examples of a cruel humanity. An Australian student was murdered by teenagers for no other reason than they were bored. And an elderly World War II vet was savagely killed for no apparent reason. Our culture is fueled by violent video games and dehumanizing music. The results are heart-breaking.

In contrast the army of God's people goes out under the banner of the cross to help and heal in the name of Jesus. The church encourages Christians every week to take sincere interest in others and to make their needs primary. "Us only" is an inadequate model for today's church.

Brooks is pastor of Siluria Baptist Church of Alabaster and a member of the Christian Life Commission.

SPECIAL SUNDAYS REMAINING IN 2014

● **Social Issues Sunday:**
August 3

● **Anti-Gambling Sunday:**
September 21

● **World Hunger Sunday:**
October 12

● **ALCAP Sunday:**
November 9

The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources.
The opinions in the *Christian Life Report* are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission.

SBC's Moore, Others Urge Support for RFRA

*Citing the Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, joined other religious leaders in a letter urging congressional leaders to protect the Religious Freedom Restoration Act if it comes under attack. The letter was addressed to Speaker of the House John Boehner, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.*

We are leaders of diverse faith communities representing over 100 million Americans. Our faith communities worship in many different ways, and we have different views on many things. But in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions in favor of Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Wood Specialties (*Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores*), we are united in our staunch support for maintaining all of the existing provisions and protections of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). RFRA is a highly flexible legal standard that protects the rights and liberties of individuals of all religious faiths, including the most vulnerable.

The Supreme Court affirmed that all Americans—including family business owners—should be free to live and work according to their faith and receive the protections afforded by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. When President Clinton signed RFRA into law over twenty years ago, he finalized the work of overwhelming bipartisan majorities in the United States House and Senate. Only three Members of Congress voted against RFRA. Not one of Congress's 535 Members suggested that this landmark new law would not protect a person's free exercise of religion if she chose to provide for herself, her family, and her employees by starting a business.

In the United States, freedom of religion has always included—and should always include—the right to live out one's religion and act according to one's conscience outside the walls of one's house of worship. Every single day, millions of Americans are motivated by their faith to go and serve the neediest among us. The good works of these individuals of faith can be seen in soup kitchens, hospitals, schools, hospices—and, yes, family-owned businesses.

For over two decades, RFRA has protected Americans of all faiths from government coercion. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Christians,

Buddhists, Sikhs, and others all benefit when powerful government officials know that, as President Bill Clinton stated when he signed RFRA, government must meet “a very high level of proof before it interferes with someone's free exercise of religion.”

We have come together to write this letter with one specific plea: Do not amend or repeal RFRA, one of our nation's most vital legal protections for the religious freedom and rights of conscience of every person of every faith.

Changing RFRA because some disagree with one particular application of the law would set a dark precedent by undermining the fundamental principle of religious freedom for all, even for those whose religious beliefs may be unpopular at the moment. Congress has never passed legislation with the specific purpose of reducing Americans' religious freedom. It should not consider doing so now.

Freedom of religion, like freedom of speech, must stand for all Americans, for all time.

In addition to Moore, other signatories include: Matthew C. Harrison, president, The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod; Rabbi Leonard Matanky, president, and Rabbi Mark Dratch, executive vice president, The Rabbinical Council of America; Joseph E. Kurtz, archbishop of Louisville and president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Charles E. Blake Sr., presiding bishop, Church of God in Christ; Gary E. Stevenson, presiding bishop, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; George O. Wood, general superintendent, Assemblies of God, USA; Nathan J. Diament, executive director for public policy, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America; Dwayne O. Leslie, director of legislative affairs, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; L. Roy Taylor, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America.

On Transgender Identity

A Resolution Adopted by SBC Messengers in Baltimore, Md., June 2014

WHEREAS, All persons are created in God's image and are made to glorify Him (Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 43:7); and

WHEREAS, God's design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes, male and female (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6) which designate the fundamental distinction that God has embedded in the very biology of the human race; and

WHEREAS, Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles as ordained by God are part of the created order and should find expression in every human heart (Genesis 2:18, 21–24; 1 Corinthians 11:7–9; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Timothy 2:12–14); and

WHEREAS, The Fall of man into sin and God's subsequent curse have introduced brokenness and futility into God's good creation (Genesis 3:1–24; Romans 8:20); and

WHEREAS, According to a 2011 survey, about 700,000 Americans perceive their gender identity to be at variance with the physical reality of their biological birth sex; and

WHEREAS, Transgenderism differs from hermaphroditism or intersexualism in that the sex of the individual is not biologically ambiguous but psychologically ambiguous; and

WHEREAS, The American Psychiatric Association removed this condition (aka, "gender identity disorder") from its list of disorders in 2013, substituting "gender identity disorder" with "gender dysphoria"; and

WHEREAS, The American Psychiatric Association includes among its treatment options for gender dysphoria cross-sex hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery, and social and legal transition to the desired gender; and

WHEREAS, News reports indicate that parents are allowing their children to undergo these therapies; and

WHEREAS, Many LGBT activists have sought to normalize the transgender experience and to define gender according to one's self-perception apart from biological anatomy; and

WHEREAS, The separation of one's gender identity from the physical reality of biological birth sex poses the harmful effect of engendering an understanding of sexuality and personhood that is fluid; and

WHEREAS, Some public schools are encouraging parents and teachers to affirm the feelings of children whose self-perception of their own gender is at variance with their biological sex; and

WHEREAS, Some public schools are allowing access to restrooms and locker rooms according to children's self-perception of gender and not according to their biological sex; and

WHEREAS, The state of New Jersey prohibits licensed counselors from any attempt to change a

child's "gender expression"; and

WHEREAS, These cultural currents run counter to the biblical teaching as summarized in The Baptist Faith and Message, Article III, that "Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, June 10–11, 2014, affirm God's good design that gender identity is determined by biological sex and not by one's self-perception—a perception which is often influenced by fallen human nature in ways contrary to God's design (Ephesians 4:17–18); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we grieve the reality of human fallenness which can result in such biological manifestations as intersexuality or psychological manifestations as gender identity confusion and point all to the hope of the redemption of our bodies in Christ (Romans 8:23); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we extend love and compassion to those whose sexual self-understanding is shaped by a distressing conflict between their biological sex and their gender identity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we invite all transgender persons to trust in Christ and to experience renewal in the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:15–16); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we love our transgender neighbors, seek their good always, welcome them to our churches and, as they repent and believe in Christ, receive them into church membership (2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Galatians 5:14); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we regard our transgender neighbors as image-bearers of Almighty God and therefore condemn acts of abuse or bullying committed against them; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose efforts to alter one's bodily identity (e.g., cross-sex hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery) to refashion it to conform with one's perceived gender identity; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we continue to oppose steadfastly all efforts by any governing official or body to validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy (Isaiah 5:20); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we oppose all cultural efforts to validate claims to transgender identity; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That our love for the Gospel and urgency for the Great Commission must include declaring the whole counsel of God, proclaiming what Scripture teaches about God's design for us as male and female persons created in His image and for His glory (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 20:27; Romans 11:36).



Alabama Baptist State Convention
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS
P.O. Box 11870 | Montgomery, AL 36111

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MONTGOMERY, AL
PERMIT NO. 441

F A C T S & I S S U E S

Compiled by Keith Hinson — Associate for Public Relations & Christian Ethics
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, (334) 613-2289, khinson@alsbom.org

Just as students have the right to verbally speak on the school campus during non-instructional time, they also have the right to distribute religious literature. Religious clubs have the same right to sponsor activities as other clubs in the public school. Simply meaning that, if a secular club has permission to display posters or use the public address system to make announcements regarding their planned and upcoming events, religious clubs are to be given the same access and the same consideration to promote their events or activities. — *Jeff Fuller, "Religious Rights of Students Are Misunderstood," www.drjwfuller.com*

Casinos are also targeting older Americans. One-third of the U.S. population visited a casino in 2012 and more than half were fifty years or older. Casinos often prey on older customers by catering to their special needs, providing wheelchairs, scooters, adult diapers and other amenities for customers with mobility and health problems. This manufactured "kindness" is especially appealing to people who are lonely and isolated from the larger

community. — *Joe Carter, "Issue Analysis: Casinos and Predatory Gambling," [Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, www.erc.com](http://www.erc.com)*

Transforming flesh and blood relationships into a grace community involves such qualities as availability, involvement, nurturing, consistency, personal warmth and concern as well as a commitment to God and to teach His Word. Turning a family into a grace community is a full-time calling. It is not something for the nominally concerned. It also is a God-given responsibility because God made the family the first school of Christian living. — *Bob Terry, "Family — the First School of Christian Living," [The Alabama Baptist](http://TheAlabamaBaptist.com), 5/8/2014*

If you and I are sexually pure, that means we do not provoke or please our sexual desires outside of God's will. In other words, we do not read, watch, listen to, or do things that will stir up our sexual desires. ... God's will for sex is that we enjoy it only within marriage. — *Leah Holder, "Never too late for sexual purity, author says," [Baptist Press](http://BaptistPress.com), 6/27/2014*