

REMARKS TO THE FACULTY  
Andrew Westmoreland  
Samford University  
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Through our regular process for sharing responsibilities at Samford, as members of the faculty you'll be considering important questions today. Dr. Luthin has asked me to say a few words regarding one of those questions. In this response to his request, Dr. Luthin will receive perhaps more than he anticipated. I wrote these paragraphs during several flights while returning from China yesterday. The comments are more lengthy than I would prefer, but they are a pure expression of my mind and my spirit. At the outset, let me acknowledge to you my own sense of inadequacy for so many of the responsibilities that are required of me as Samford president, perhaps never more than in this moment.

I hold what I consider to be, along with perhaps the vast majority of Samford's constituents, an understanding of biblical marriage as between a man and a woman. I view as relatively timeless some biblical teachings regarding human sexuality which others find to be outdated. In speaking of these things that I believe, I tend to refer to them as biblical truth, even as I recognize that others hold different views and interpretations of scripture. I am not angry toward others who believe differently, but my views are honestly held and I have come to them over an extended period of time. From the depths of my soul, I desire to be faithful to a just and loving God and to abide by the authority of scripture. Theologically, I am what some would consider a moderate, some a conservative, some a fundamentalist, but practically none a liberal.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, that he came to us, lived a blameless life, died as an atonement for my sins and the sins of every person, and that those of us who claim Christ are called to demonstrate his love--the love that is within us--to every person. I am no more deserving of that love than any other person, regardless of any differences between us. In a display of grace that is beyond my comprehension, I believe that Christ died for all of us.

Many years ago, long before I came to Samford, a person I knew, a man who had served as a pastor, having retired and then having spent time as a volunteer with Christian outreach efforts in Asia, stopped me as I was making my way to a table in a crowded restaurant. Surrounded by patrons enjoying their lunch, the man began to speak to me.

"I'm sorry to bother you," he said, "but I have been intending to speak with you for several weeks. When I returned from Asia, I made a list of all the people I needed to see, and you are on that list. I want to apologize to you. During the time that I was away, I came to the realization that, while the message of Christ is about truth and grace, my entire ministry--all of it--has been only about truth. I have failed to teach and to model grace and in the process I have hurt many people, including you. So I am asking for your forgiveness."

While I have a vivid memory of what this man said to me, I have only a foggy recollection of my response. I hope that I was kind and appropriately sober. It was important for him to deliver the message to me, although I don't ever recall having been particularly wronged by him. Perhaps he had said things about me to others that never reached my ears, things that he regretted. But as important as it was for him to speak to me of grace, it was equally significant for me to absorb the unspoken part of his message. Even as he acknowledged that too little of his passion as a Christ-follower had been to pursue grace, I was struck by the fact that too little of my passion had been to pursue truth and to subject my will to God's plan. So there we were, each with our own failures, our own burdens, each with approaches to following Christ that reflected perhaps half an understanding. In my adult life, truth and grace are the touchstones that have emerged from my acceptance of Christ. I am an exemplar of neither, but the concepts answer to each other across the arc of my mind during those moments in which I pause long enough to dwell on the mystery of God.

Many of us who hold what are known as "traditional" views of marriage and human sexuality today are called "haters." The term is intended to hurt, and it does. So volleys fly back and forth between camps while positions and hearts are hardened, and we run the risk, the very serious risk, that we will drive away from our churches and our universities and our families a generation that thinks about these questions in different ways than we have known. I choose not to walk that path, because brokenness already abounds and I am loath to add to it. I believe that we are people who are capable of discussing differences without rancor, perhaps modeling for our students and others a way to move along this most tortured route.

I don't know what you will do with the matter of "Samford Together" today. Whatever action you take regarding the organization, my intention is for us to love these students, and I will work with our trustees and faculty and staff and religious leaders and others to do that. I don't have to agree with them to love them and to listen to them and to gain in my own understanding of their needs. Regardless of the outcome of the vote, I will work throughout the summer to thread these pieces together, never abandoning truth, the biblical truth to which I adhere, and never abandoning grace. I will want to take the time necessary this

summer to work especially with our trustees on these questions. If you vote to recommend approval of the organization, I would likely wait until the September meeting of the board for formal consideration of any proposal, as I would want the trustees to have the same luxury of time that you received for discussion, reflection and prayer, and to be further involved in shaping an outcome that is best for Samford and for all of our students. If you vote to recommend the denial of the organization, my outreach efforts will not be diminished.

As you hear me today, some of you may be disappointed by my unwillingness to completely embrace contemporary views of human sexuality and the theology that is used to undergird them. Likewise, some of you may be disappointed that I appear to be offering accommodation to those who hold such views. A clearer path for a different institution with a different president might be to take a less nuanced approach, lining up either fully in favor of more recent views of human sexuality or in favor of a campus that is closed to the exchange of viewpoints and ideas, but that approach does not reflect who I am, so I would be incapable of leading in either of those directions. Furthermore, I am convinced that neither approach is reflective of the Samford that I have come to know so well during these years that I have been here. It is a place of abiding truth and of sustaining grace. Together, and with God's guidance, we will achieve whatever purpose he has in store for us. In readily acknowledging my many frailties, I ask that you join me on this journey, because I need you, all of you.

Thank you.