

Tim Tebow Can Do No ... Right?

You almost needed a scorecard last month to follow the twisting, turning saga of Heisman Trophy winning New York Jets' backup quarterback Tim Tebow's long-planned speaking engagement at First Baptist Church Dallas in April as part of the grand opening of a \$130 million, state-of-the art worship center and campus in the heart of downtown, beginning Easter Sunday.

The hubbub began Feb. 15 with a headline in the *New York Daily News*, one of the hometown papers of record for Tebow's team, referencing his "hate date at a Texas church."

The article initially misrepresented past comments made by the church's pastor, Robert Jeffress, specifically related to issues of homosexuality and AIDS, as well as Judaism.

A media firestorm quickly followed, with numerous New York and national sports and news outlets piling on. These included a national CBS sports columnist who said that "agreeing to speak at Jeffress' church is Tebow's greatest sin ... and a mistake he will never overcome."

As the drumbeats reached a deafening crescendo, Tim Tebow abruptly announced his change of plans, announcing via a series of tweets, "Due to new information that has been brought to my attention, I have decided to cancel my upcoming appearance."

Immediately the tide turned again, with "#TebowCaves" trending on Twitter and many in the Christian community asking the quarterback to prayerfully reconsider. A coalition of Texas and national pastors representing many denominational and ethnic backgrounds issued a statement standing with First Baptist Dallas and Robert Jeffress. The group called on Tebow to fully understand what is at stake if he succumbs to pressure by those who try to marginalize and demean

individuals who stand for biblical truth.

Of course it is ultimately Tim Tebow's decision where and when he speaks. But considering his minister at First Baptist Jacksonville is the former senior pastor of First Baptist Dallas and the two churches both emphasize biblical preaching and share traditional historic doctrines of the Christian faith, it appears that his cancellation was for pragmatic and professional, not principled, reasons. Noting he needed to avoid controversy at this time, Tebow indicated he would like to speak at the church at a future date.

Like many evangelical churches, First Baptist Dallas is built on the truth of Scripture, even though at times that approach can be perceived as controversial or counter to the prevailing winds of culture. Contrary to myriad editorials of late, the Christian gospel is a message of hope, not hate; salvation, not judgment; emphasizing God's love, grace and new beginnings available to all.

The reason for the recent media firestorm is not because the Bible has changed, but because society has changed.

At the end of the day, this incident reflects yet another example of the pressures against religious liberty in our nation, succinctly summed up in a tweet by @RickWarren: "Fast food Christian CEO bullied. Pastor bullied out of praying publicly. Today, athlete bullied out of speaking AT A CHURCH."

Indeed the Zeitgeist, or "spirit of the times," is often set by our celebrity icons from the world of entertainment and sport, but it often runs counter to the Holy Spirit, emphasized in biblical preaching. Curiously, Mr. Tebow reflects both, and that may be where the conundrum lies, as the Jets shop him for a trade this week.

Using the metaphor of professional football, another Dallas pastor, Tony Evans, likens the role of the church to that of the officiating teams in the NFL. He observed that the

officials are not players, nor are they spectators, but rather serve as ambassadors of the commissioner to ensure the objectivity of the game, based on the league handbook.

Evans opines that while one player can knock another player down, a ref can take any player out. In the game of life, and the battle for our culture, the church—specifically pastors—function as the officiating team. They serve not as ambassadors of the commissioner, but the Creator, enforcing His rules found in the Bible to maintain moral order against cultural decay, political correctness and opposing forces of secularism and relativism.

The problem with this First Baptist kerfuffle is that it goes counter to the rules by which Tim Tebow normally has to play. This time, the quarterback “called an audible,” but in the process seems to have grabbed and blown the ref’s whistle to stop the game.

Now additional “officials,” including the Texas Pastor’s Council and other clergy, are throwing down their red review flags, questioning whether Tebow should be disqualified or is fit to play in future league games (church speaking opportunities).

Sounds like Tebow is going to have to take that up directly with the Commissioner ...

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