

Selections from the Book of Confessions on Marriage and Sexuality

Selections are taken from the Book of Confessions, 2004, which includes page numbers

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

(4.108-1.09, p. 47)

Part III: THANKFULNESS

Q. 108. What does the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all unchastity is condemned by God, and that we should therefore detest it from the heart, and live chaste and disciplined lives, whether in holy wedlock or in single life.

Q. 109. Does God forbid nothing more than adultery and such gross sins in this commandment?

A. Since both our body and soul are a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is his will that we keep both pure and holy. Therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires and whatever may excite another person to them.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1561)

(5.245f, p. 113)

CHAPTER XXIX

Of Celibacy, Marriage and the Management of Domestic Affairs

SINGLE PEOPLE. Those who have the gift of celibacy from heaven, so that from the heart or with their whole soul are pure and continent and are not aflame with passion, let them serve the Lord in that calling, as long as they feel endowed with that divine gift; and let them not lift up themselves above others, but let them serve the Lord continuously in simplicity and humility (I Cor. 7:7 ff.). For such are more apt to attend to divine things than those who are distracted with the private affairs of a family. But if, again, the gift be taken away, and they feel a continual burning, let them call to mind the words of the apostle: "It is better to marry than to be aflame" (I Cor. 7:9).

MARRIAGE. For marriage (which is the medicine of incontinency, and continency itself) was instituted by the Lord God himself, who blessed it most bountifully, and willed man and woman to cleave one to the other inseparably, and to live together in complete love and concord (Matt. 19:4 ff). Whereupon we know that the apostle said: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). And again: "If a girl marries, she does not sin" (I Cor. 7:28).

THE SECTS. We therefore condemn polygamy, and those who condemn second marriages.

HOW MARRIAGES ARE TO BE CONTRACTED. We teach that marriages are to be lawfully contracted in the fear of the Lord, and not against the laws which forbid certain degrees of consanguinity, lest the marriages should be incestuous. Let marriages be made with consent of the parents, or of those who take the place of parents, and above all for that purpose for which the Lord instituted marriages. Moreover, let them be kept holy with the utmost faithfulness, piety, love and purity of those joined together. Therefore let them guard against quarrels, dissensions, lust and adultery.

MATRIMONIAL FORUM. Let lawful courts be established in the Church, and holy judges who may care for marriages, and may repress all unchastity and shamefulness, and before whom matrimonial disputes may be settled.

THE REARING OF CHILDREN. Children are to be brought up by the parents in the fear of the Lord; and parents are to provide for their children, remembering the saying of the apostle: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Tim. 5:8). But especially they should teach their children honest trades or professions by which they may support themselves. They should keep them from idleness and in all these things instill in them true faith in God, lest through a lack of confidence or too much security or filthy greed they become dissolute and achieve no success. And it is most certain that those works which are done by parents in true faith by way of domestic duties and the management of their households are in God's sight holy and truly good works. They are no less pleasing to God than prayers, fasting and almsgiving. For thus the apostle has taught in his epistles, especially in those to Timothy and Titus. And with the same apostle we account the doctrine of those who forbid marriage or openly castigate or indirectly discredit it, as if it were not holy and pure, among the doctrine of demons. We also detest an impure single life, the secret and open lusts and fornications of hypocrites pretending to be continent when they are the most incontinent of all. All these God will judge. We do not disapprove of riches or rich men, if they be godly and use their riches well. But we reject the sect of the Apostolics, etc.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647; as amended in 1958) (United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America)

CHAPTER XXIV

(6.131f, p 148)

Of Marriage and Divorce

1. Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life.

2. Because the corruption of man is apt unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage, and because the Church is concerned with the establishment of marriage in the Lord as Scripture sets it forth, and with the present penitence as well as with the past innocence or guilt of those whose marriage has been broken; therefore as a breach of that holy relation may occasion divorce, so remarriage after a divorce granted on grounds explicitly stated in Scripture or implicit in the gospel of Christ may be sanctioned in keeping with his redemptive gospel, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifest.

pEd. 1647 reads: "and."

qEd. 1647, Chapter XXIV reads:

"I. Marriage is to be between one Man and one Woman: neither is it lawfull for any Man to have more then one Wife, nor for any Woman to have more then one Husband, at the same time.

"II. Marriage was ordained for the mutuall help of Husband and Wife, for the increase of man-kinde with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed and, for preventing of uncleannesse.

"III. It is lawfull for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgement, to give their consent. Yet, is it the duty of Christians to marry onely in the Lord: And therefore such as professe the true reformed Religion, should not marry with Infidels, Papists or other Idolaters: Neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintaine damnable Heresies. "

IV. Marriage ought not be within the degrees of Consanguinity or Affinity forbidden in the Word: Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawfull by any Law of man, or consent of Parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife. The man may not marry any of his wives kindred, nearer in blood, then he may of his own: nor the woman of her husbands kindred, then of her own.

"V. Adultery, or fornication committed after a Contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that Contract. In the case of Adultery after marriage, it is lawfull for the innocent party to sue out a Divorce: And after the Divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

"VI. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduely to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but Adultery, or such wilfull desertion as can no way be remedied, by the Church or Civil Magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of Marriage: Wherein, a publicke and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed: And the Persons concerned in it, not left to their own wills and discretion, in their owne case."

CHAPTER XXVI

(6.133f, p. 150)

Of Marriage and Divorce

(Presbyterian Church in the United States)

1. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.¹

2. Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife;² for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of their moral and spiritual character; ³ for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.⁴

3. All persons who are able with judgment to give their consent may marry,⁵ except within the limits of blood relationship forbidden by Scripture,⁶ and such marriages are valid before God in the eyes of the church.⁷ But no marriage can be fully and securely Christian in spirit or in purpose unless both partners are committed to a common Christian faith and to a deeply shared intention of building a Christian home. Evangelical Christians should seek as partners in marriage only persons who hold in common a sound basis of evangelical faith.⁸

4. Marriage for the Christian has religious as well as civil significance. ⁹ The distinctive contribution of the church in performing the marriage ceremony is to affirm the divine institution of marriage; ¹⁰ to invoke God's blessing upon those who enter into the marital relationship in accordance with his word;¹¹ to hear the vows of those who desire to be married; and to assure the married partners of God's grace within their new relationship.¹²

5. It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, thus allowing for no dissolution save that caused by the death of either husband or wife.¹³ However, the weaknesses of one or both partners may lead to gross and persistent denial of the marriage vows so that marriage dies at the heart

and the union becomes intolerable; yet only in cases of extreme, unrepented-of, and irremediable unfaithfulness (physical or spiritual) should separation or divorce be considered. Such separation or divorce is accepted as permissible only because of the failure of one or both of the partners, and does not lessen in any way the divine intention for indissoluble union.¹⁴

6. The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the church, in keeping with the redemptive gospel of Christ, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifested.¹⁵

7. Divorced persons should give prayerful thought to discover if God's vocation for them is to remain unmarried, since one failure in this realm raises serious question as to the rightness and wisdom of undertaking another union.¹⁶

¹⁴Ed. 1647 reads: "and of their children."

¹⁶Ed. 1647 reads: "out of which, there is no ordinary possibility of Salvation."

The Westminster Larger Catechism

(7.127, 7.130, p. 197)

Q. 17. How did God create man?

A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground,² and the woman of the rib of man;³ endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls;⁴ made them after his own image,⁵ in knowledge,⁶ righteousness and holiness,⁷ having the law of God written in their hearts,⁸ and power to fulfill it, with dominion over the creatures;⁹ yet subject to fall.

Q. 20. What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created?

A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created was, the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth,¹ putting the creatures under his dominion,² ordaining marriage for his help,³ affording him communion with himself,⁴ and instituting the Sabbath;⁵ entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, ⁶ of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.⁷

The Confession of 1967

(9.44, 9.47, pp. 259, 260)

PART II: THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

4. RECONCILIATION IN SOCIETY

a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess....

d. The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.