



What's Happening with the Marriage Committee?

An Open Letter from The Presbyterian Coalition

October 6, 2009

"[W]e do not allow all possible interpretations (2 Peter 1:20)."

Book of Confessions, The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.010

Members of the Special Committee on Marriage and Civil Unions disagree on how to interpret Scripture. Thus, their recently released [report](#) draws its conclusions based primarily on that failure to agree. And because of that fundamental failure, the committee's weakened conclusions fail to adequately serve the Church, members of the Church, the world at large, and God's truth itself, as revealed in Scripture.

A primary obligation of any committee preparing to offer authoritative Christian leadership on a matter of theological and moral importance is to the integrity of the message of Scripture. God has lovingly instructed us through the Word, and our obligation is to heed that clear instruction above all else. In addition, each minister and elder on such a committee has taken a vow to "receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and ... [to] be instructed and led by those confessions as [they] lead the people of God." (BOO, W-4.4003c)

Further, it was the express responsibility of this special committee to come to terms with our scriptural understandings of marriage. Precisely because the General Assembly appeared at a loss to make such a decision, it gave the special committee the salutary task of providing clear and decisive recommendations. Thus, the special committee was constituted and funded precisely to come to a difficult decision, not to waver in indecision.

For these reasons, the committee report, as it now stands, fails the church. It draws no solid conclusions. It makes only the feeblest attempt to speak from a scriptural or confessional basis. It

reduces a matter of faith and moral practice -- on which both Scripture and our confessions have spoken clearly -- to a level of human social consensus, the mere seeking of peaceful co-existence among parties with differing views. In doing so, the committee errs by giving novel, unbiblical, unproved viewpoints equal weight with the settled, biblical, enduring moral practice of the Church.

Want to Know More?

Dr. Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a member of the Coalition's board, has written extensively on the topic of homosexuality. His careful exposition of scripture is a great gift to the church. Check out his [website](#) for excellent resources in this area!

The biblical and historical witness of the Church throughout history and around the world is clear and unequivocal. It is expressed in the Creation mandate of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, which was used as the foundation for Jesus' instruction on marital monogamy and permanence in Matthew 19:4-6 (= Mark 10:6-9):

In response he said, "Haven't you read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female [Gen 1:27]? And he said, "Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh [Gen 2:24]. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What then God yoked together, let no person separate."

Jesus did not merely affirm Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Rather, he based his limitation of two persons to a valid sexual relationship on the twoness of the sexes. In Romans 1:23-27, Paul intentionally echoed Gen 1:26-27 in rejecting homosexual practice because it was a violation of the male-female prerequisite for sexual relations ordained by the Creator at creation, not because of how well or how badly it was done in his cultural milieu.

Scripture and our confessions alike condemn same-sex sexual relationships and indeed any sexual relationship outside the bond of marriage -- sinful relationships and behaviors that God seeks to redeem and transform, not accommodate.

We urge the Special Committee on Marriage and Civil Unions to come to terms with the biblical and confessional teachings and to bring to the General Assembly of 2010 a clear, compelling report and recommendations that reflect a profoundly biblical and confessional understanding of marriage. An inchoate and unclear consensus statement that struggles but fails to join irreconcilable opposites would not serve the Church.

We further urge this committee to help the church reach out in ministry to all of us who are in need of the transformation of the Gospel in the expression of our sexuality, that sexual expression may conform to the Word and the will of God.

"The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written."

Book of Confessions, The Confession of 1967, 9.26

And Now It's YOUR Turn!

The Committee is seeking more input BEFORE NOVEMBER 15th. Please take time to encourage them, in 1000 words or less, to hold fast to the unequivocal teaching of Scripture in this important matter. Thank you for your faithful response! Just [click here](#) to send them your email.

In Christ,

Sarah Hill, Coordinator

office@presbycoalition.org

