



presbyterians for renewal

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TO: The Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage
RE: The Place of Covenanted Same-Gender Partnerships in the Christian Community
DATE: August 13, 2009

One of the treasures of Presbyterian worship is the “Statement on the Gift of Marriage” found in the Service for Christian Marriage, *Book of Common Worship*.¹ Its great theme is that the marriage of a man and a woman is not a human invention, but the good gift of our loving God. The Statement, intended to be read aloud at the beginning of the marriage rite, includes variations of the phrase, “God gave us marriage...,” no less than six times, ultimately declaring that marriage, “...is a new way of life, created, ordered, and blessed by God.”

This Statement is not some liturgical invention. The vision of creation found in Genesis 2 makes explicit that God’s gift of marriage is inextricably linked to our creation as male and female beings in God’s image. After the creation of humanity as male and female comes a sentence: “For this reason a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”² When some Pharisees challenged Jesus with a question on divorce, he answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”³ The Apostle Paul also referenced Genesis 2 in urging the Corinthian believers to avoid any kind of sexual immorality.⁴ The author of Genesis, Jesus, and Paul are clear: the creation of the sexes is the creation of marriage. Marriage is given to us as a gift. It is to be received with humility and gratitude. The shape of marriage as the union of one man and one woman is not ours to alter.

The biblical understanding of marriage is that of a union bridging the differences between male and female. Men and women are literally “made for each other,” not only in their similarities, but especially in their profound differences — differences also ordained by a loving Creator. When a man and woman are united in marriage they become a whole being in a way that same-gender individuals cannot. A same-gender relationship brings together like with like, and thus can never be considered the equivalent of marriage.

¹ *Book of Common Worship*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 842

² Genesis 2:24 (NRSV)

³ Matthew 19:4-6

⁴ I Corinthians 6:15-20

It is on the foundation of its teaching on marriage that the Bible in various contexts forbids and condemns all homosexual relations. (See Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11.) These are not isolated “clobber texts” as has sometimes been alleged. Rather, the biblical prohibition of same-gender relations is in full unity with the Bible’s teaching on God’s gift of marriage and the life-giving pattern of Christian discipleship. As followers of Jesus, we are committed to live in faithfulness to Scripture, regardless of the license that may be given by secular law or the current caprice of an ever-changing culture.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently affirmed, for the fourth time, that officers of the church are “to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness.”⁵ This standard is explicit for ordained officers, but as Reformed Christians we reject any two-tiered system of righteousness that would hold those called to ordained ministry to a higher standard than any other Christian. There is but one calling, and it is the same for all members of the Christian community. Our Savior commands, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”⁶ In calling officers to live in fidelity in marriage or chastity (abstaining from sexual relations) in singleness, we express the church’s expectation that officers will model the way of life that is God’s calling for all people.

Presbyterians For Renewal believes that for the PC(USA) to bless or tolerate any kind of same-gender partnerships within the Christian community, or sexual relationships outside the covenant of marriage, would be to violate the expressed will of Christ set forth in Scripture. In an age of sexual chaos and confusion, it is imperative that the Christian community reaffirm in word and in practice that marriage between a man and a woman is God’s good provision for human well-being, for the ordering of society and family life, and the only relationship within which sexual union is appropriate and blessed by God.

At the same time and with equal urgency, the Christian community must learn to extend the love and grace of Jesus Christ to people who experience same-gender attractions. The Body of Christ has too often excluded gay and lesbian persons, or hypocritically held them to one standard, while having another standard for heterosexuals outside the covenant of marriage. In sexual behavior, as in all other areas of Christian discipleship, we must hold together truth and compassion, godliness and grace and apply the same standard to all.

In a post-Christian culture, it is time for the followers of Jesus to return to our counter-cultural roots, drawing our identity and norms not from a lost and confused world, but from Christ alone. The Corinthian believers of the first century also lived in a context of sexual license and confusion, yet the Apostle Paul called them to a better way: “Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. *And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*”⁷

⁵ Book of Order G-6.0106b

⁶ Luke 9:23

⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (emphasis added)