

A Declaration for Faith and Life

Introduction

In every age the Church faces temptations to imitate the world rather than her Lord, and thereby to lose the distinctiveness of her calling. We believe that modern views about sexuality, one of the manifestations of the moral relativism of our age, have resulted in a serious threat to the integrity of the Church's life. In our time, the Christian foundations of moral life are challenged culturally and debate has arisen in the Church over whether the Scripture is ultimately authoritative for moral practices, over whether Scripture speaks clearly in these matters, and whether obedience in morality is essential to living the Christian life.

We believe the loss of a biblical standard for sexual morality to be a cause of great damage to the physical and spiritual lives of all people. The mounting demand by some Church members to accept sexual sin promotes infidelity, deters God's people from seeking protection from sin and its consequences, and gives the appearance that repentance, forgiveness and restoration are unnecessary. This is a denial of the plain meaning of Scripture and it places in jeopardy both those who teach

wrongly, and those who hear and follow a false teaching of serious moral and spiritual consequence. This crisis calls for a clear and definitive response consistent with the biblical heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Thus we affirm the following "Declaration for Faith and Life" as necessary for our time. We make no attempt to defend all the doctrines of Christian faith or to discuss God's grace in bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ. We seek only to draw into the sharpest possible focus what is the necessary fruit of obedience to Jesus Christ in our sexuality. We speak from no wisdom inherent in ourselves. Rather, relying solely upon the grace of Almighty God, we ground our affirmations in His written Word, which is the only reliable guide for a life in accord with God's will,

Declaration

I

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are our only authority for faith and practice. The written Word of Scripture mediates to us the living Word, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who always speaks and works in congruence with the written Word. Handed down to us by the communion of the saints, summarized in our confessions of faith, studied and opened to us by teachers and preachers in the community of the Church, the Scriptures are ever trustworthy as we daily live by their truth. All that is necessary for faith and for life is either explicitly stated in Scripture or may be deduced from it, and we affirm that it provides its own interpretation. Because it is God's revelation, it is not bound by culture or by time. The Bible is thus the authority we are called to obey in every circumstance.

Therefore, we reject the false doctrines:

- that the meaning of Scripture is solely a matter of individual interpretation, separated from interpretation of its own words, its historical context, or apart from the apostolic faith and the confessions of the Church universal; that because of historical, cultural, and scientific distance from our time, the biblical Word is no longer applicable;
- that the Holy Spirit of the Triune God speaks contrary to Jesus Christ as he is mediated to us through the Word written in the Bible;
- that human conscience, feeling, wisdom, scientific inquiry, or medical, psychological and sociological knowledge are sufficient in themselves, apart from—or even contrary to—the Bible, to discern the will of God.

II

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body (I Cor. 6:19-20 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments teach that we belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to ourselves but to God. God is the eternal Word by whom we were created. Jesus Christ is that Word made flesh, by whose sacrifice we are redeemed, and is the living Word who manifests the new humanity in His own life and ours. Though he was celibate, he lacked nothing necessary for full communion with God and with humanity. It is by the power of His Holy Spirit that we are enabled to follow Him as obedient disciples, rejecting the passions of our sinful nature and choosing instead to live holy lives in our conduct. This triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is sovereign over all the circumstances of our lives, and only in communion with this God can we be made whole.

Therefore, we reject the false doctrines:

- that we can claim autonomy and dominion over our own bodies;
- that sexual intercourse is necessary for whole personhood or full communion between persons;
- that it is not possible to control and discipline the expression of our sexual desires;
- that we can be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ apart from His Spirit's transforming power that enables us to follow His pattern of obedience to God.

III.

(Jesus) 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" (Matt. 19:4-6 NRSV)

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments plainly tell us that God in His love for us created us male and female, and that He pronounced His creation "good." Scripture tells us that God intended from the beginning, as He intends today, in spite of our sin and the fall of the whole creation, that our sexual desires be fulfilled solely within the context of the marriage of one woman and one man in a faithful and joyful union of one flesh. Scripture tells us that the marriage of husband and wife is for the purpose of their mutual help, for the safeguarding, undergirding and development of their moral and spiritual character, and for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Furthermore, God has expressly condemned sexual intercourse outside of the marriage covenant. This prohibition applies to married persons committing adultery, to sexual relationships between unmarried men and women, and, because God's order intends the sexual relationship to be between male and female, to homosexual practice, a perversion of God's created order.

Therefore, we reject the false doctrines:

- that the body, the sexual desires of male and female for one another, and the institutions of marriage and family are extraneous to God's created order; that they are matters of indifference in our new life in Jesus Christ; and that we are entitled to alter or redefine them arbitrarily as suits our social circumstances or personal desires;
- that sexual relationships only require mutual consent, without regard to the Scriptural bonds of marriage;
- that God intends for persons to engage in adulterous or homosexual or other non-marital sexual intercourse, and that God pronounces such intercourse to be a "good gift";
- that Christian compassion and justice require the Church to condone adulterous and homosexual and other non-marital sexual relationships among its members, and to regard those who engage in such practices as living a manner of life that demonstrates the Christian gospel and fits them for ordination as elders, deacons, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

IV.

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him (Jesus Christ). For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil (II Cor. 5:9-10 NRSV).

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments testify that we are all made in the image of God, responsible to Him, that God is not mocked, and He holds all of us accountable to His will revealed to us in His Word. The Bible warns us that God brings His judgment, both present and future, upon those who defy Him, but Scripture also promises that God forgives and transforms all who turn to Him in repentance and trust.

Therefore, we reject the false doctrines:

- that persistent, unrepentant sexual activity that is forbidden by Scripture is acceptable to God and free from His present and future judgment;
- that some practices, though they be contrary to Scripture, are so rooted in personhood that their expressions are inevitable and cannot be changed by the power of God.

We invite all those who affirm the truths and reject the errors put forth in this declaration and who acknowledge these clear and consistent teachings of God's Word, to recall these teachings as they proclaim the Gospel and live out their relationships in community. Let our purpose be that God's people may be instructed, warned and corrected, that they may grow into maturity of faith, and that they may live holy and blameless lives before our Lord in love.

Thanks be to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself up for us all, so that by grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are saved by faith.

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it (I Thess. 5:24 NIV).

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