

Sexuality, Sin, and the ARP – A Brief Explanation of the Statement

The question posed to this committee by the 2018 General Synod, was:

That a special committee appointed by the Moderator study whether or not homosexual orientation is morally neutral, and report back to the 2019 General Synod.¹

In this essay it will be answered, by way of explanation of the background behind the new, if it be adopted by the 2019 General Synod, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Statement on Human Sexuality.

Our Shorter Catechism in Q.1 begins with a focus on the purpose of God's making humanity out of nothing that centers our minds and thoughts on the relation between the Triune God and his creation. In every way God is God, and we are not. Therefore, when beginning to consider the question of humanity's relation to one another in regards to the 7th Commandment all things must begin with his revelation to us. William Whitaker expresses it this way:

“... Scripture has for its author God himself; from whom it first proceeded and came forth. Therefore, the authority of Scripture may be proved from the author himself, since the authority of God himself shines forth in it.”²

While humanity was created without sin (Gen. 1:27-28), the Bible declares the way in which humanity fell into sin and misery (Gen. 3:6), and the manner in which we are to be redeemed from sin (Gen. 3:15, 21). The effect of sin is more than just the division between God and his creation. Adam's transgression damages the image of God in humanity (Rom. 1:23), and thereby our ability to obey the law of God in heart and life (Rom. 2:15, 8:7). The work of Christ restores this image (Rom. 5:1-2, 17, 8:29). Part and parcel of the Christian life is the call to be transformed into the image of the Son (Rom. 12:1-2). This means that the believer is to love the Law of God and to loathe sin in all its forms (Rom. 13:14). This abhorrence of sin includes not just the physical separation of the Christian from those things that bring uncleanness, but also in our thoughts and desires (Matt. 5:28). The 10th Commandment marks out particularly the way in which our heart is involved in the violation of God's Law (Ex. 20:17). This is especially the case when we consider our spiritual union with Christ (1 Cor. 6:15-20, 1 Peter 1:13). In the aforementioned thirteenth chapter of the Paul's letter to Rome the Apostle makes it clear that the approach of the Christian is to be different from the world around them. In the closing verse cited above he writes, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” Earlier in this same chapter Paul will list the 7th, 6th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Commandments and testify that to sum them up in the 2nd greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39) means to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).

Loving oneself in the context of the Christian life means self-control, by faith and trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify the flesh and the heart (1 Thess. 5:23-24). There is no sense whereby we can separate these two realities. To sin in thought is to sin in act (Deut. 15:9). The Bible knows no doctrine which would make it acceptable to not only divide thoughts from acts, but that would make it acceptable to understand oneself as being able to accept certain sins as incapable of mortification (Col. 3:1-7). This goes for every one of the Ten Commandments, as thoughts and deeds are inherently linked. Likewise, the Apostle makes it clear that there is no part of our being which is outside the Lordship of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Therefore, teaching that it is possible to entertain sin in any form is to go against the counsel of God (Mark 7:21-22, James 1:14-15) and goes against our call of bringing those in danger of hellfire out

¹ Minutes of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church 2018, 452.

² William Whitaker, *A Disputation On Holy Scripture* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 2005) 289.

from the flames (Jude 1:23), as well as truly loving ourselves enough to flee from unrighteousness and to love all that is good (1 Cor. 10:14, Amos 5:14-15, Rom. 12:9, Titus 1:8).

Thinking biblically about the particular issue of sexual orientation is itself grounded in the bonds of Gospel love of neighbor, self, and of God. If it be the case that the believer is to love the commandments (John 14:15), then any kind of intercourse outside the bonds of marriage set by the Lord Jesus Christ is in and of itself always sin (Gen. 2:24, Ex. 20:14, Lev. 18:22, Deut 7:2-4, Matt. 19:4-5, Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 5:1, 1 Cor. 6:18-20, 2 Cor. 6:14-5, Gal. 5:19-21, 1 Thess. 4:3-5, Heb. 13:4). As was noted before, this includes not only the act of fornication, but the consideration of concupiscence, i.e., the lusts of the flesh by the heart and the mind (Jer. 13:27). The only orientation recognized as lawful by the Holy Scriptures is that which places our being to the glory of God and His Word.

Theological Considerations on the Subject

Having established from the Scriptures that sin, in any form, sexual or otherwise, cannot and must not be excused or countenanced, it is time now to consider some more systematic sources to further demonstrate this. Being confessional Presbyterians we must turn to our system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards, these documents by which we confess our faith. The Divines take up this question of sin and the effects it has on the human being in their chapter on God's Decree, making note:

Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation.³

This statement makes it clear that the redeemed believer is to understand themselves to be brought out of darkness and into the glorious light of gospel truth. They are not given this gift of salvation in order to remain in bondage to sin. As the Shorter Catechism puts it in Q. 87:

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.⁴

This is further elucidated in the Confession's chapter on the subject, stating, "Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly."⁵

In other words when considering the question of the transgressions native to all human beings the foundation must be laid of the nature of sin itself and the requirements of the Gospel in regards to the Christian's response to it. These acts of repentance are of course not salvation in themselves, and it is true to say, as the Larger Catechism itself says in Q. 78, "... their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God."⁶ However, the facts of our deficiencies are not in and of themselves an excuse that the redeemed person can use to remain in unconfessed and unmortified sin.

Turning now to the more central question asked of the committee in regards to human sexuality and GLBTQ+ orientations, it is shown by the Confession and Catechisms, as it already was illustrated by the Scriptures, that there is no sense in which any sin, be they of a sexual kind or not, can be rested in and produce the flourishing life of obedience each of us are called to in Christ. The particular nature of GLBTQ+ thoughts and acts (along with heterosexual sins) are condemned in Larger Catechism Q. 139:

Q. 139. What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean

³ Ed. Alexander McPherson, *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2001) 29-30.

⁴ Ibid., 311.

⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁶ McPherson., 170.

imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks; impudent or light behavior; immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life; undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancing, stage plays; all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.⁷

Conclusion

This statement makes it clear that the nature of the breaking of the 7th Commandment is not just one of physically committing adultery, but all “unclean imaginations” or “wanton looks” and all “unnatural lusts” are just as much a violation of the law of God and thereby sin as the act itself. It should be noted that this is true of all the Commandments, not just the 7th. Our minds are captive to Christ just as much as our bodies and we must not consider sin regardless of the context. The Church cannot say that either the Bible or our Standards defend the idea that homosexual acts, orientations, and thoughts (or any heterosexual sins) are morally neutral, for sin is neither hot nor cold in the eyes of God, it is in every way abominable and worthy of condemnation. All transgressions of the law are to be confessed, repented, and put to death through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church must never find itself in the act of accommodating sin for any reason. This being said, the Church also must be watchful to always be found freely preaching salvation to sinners of all stripes. There is no sense in which a particular sin, even of the kind under consideration in this essay, places a person outside the gospel offer. We, as a committee, call all men to repentance unto life, especially ourselves, and pray for the mighty work of our glorious Redeemer in this labor of sanctification, and ultimately rest in his covenantal promise.

⁷ Ibid., 223-225.