

Concerns About Amendment 10-A  
Submitted by Dwight R. Chamberlain

It is not pleasant to realize we have to be here today to discuss this issue again. Painfully we have to ask, why do we have to do this again? We are asked again to amend a standard of ordination in our Book of Order which requires that ministers and church officers "live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness," a basic Biblical, Confessional, and moral value. The proposed amendment to replace the present standard of "fidelity and chastity" refers two times to the standards of the church for ordained service. What would the standards be for moral behavior? Does anyone know? Or do we just experiment with trial and error? We should know before we vote so we are not taken by surprise later. This proposed amendment makes it look like "fidelity with the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness" would no longer be necessary for ministers and church officers. Is that true? What kinds of behavior would be permitted? What kinds of behavior would not be permitted? Who would decide? Can anyone assure us that the moral standards of the Bible and Church would not be radically changed?

The reason this specific wording on "fidelity and chastity" was included in our Book of Order was because the Biblical and Confessional standard of "fidelity and chastity" was seriously threatened beginning in the 1970's. The standard is still being threatened now, and that is why we need to retain the language in the Book of Order.

There was a time in the past when the standard of faithfulness in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness was a given, seen as essential. The standard was unwritten in the Book of Order, but was written in the Bible and Confessions.

It was not always practiced, but it was understood to be the standard. Then the standard began to be questioned, seen as too exclusive, too restrictive, irrelevant for modern times, so the essential should be changed to a non-essential. To guard against the standard becoming a non-essential, the standard was added to the Book of Order. Now the movement in society, the media, and government seems to be in the direction of a new reality, a new essential, no longer just marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness. This new reality, this new essential, would be the approval, acceptance, and recognition of same-sex relationships as parallel and equal to marriage between a man and a woman. Now there is a strong attempt being made for the church to adopt the new reality, the new essential, too.

However, the continuing recurrence of the issue for a vote is having tragic consequences for the church. We are so polarized in the church. It is like a "Martin Luther moment" - "Here I stand, I can do no other." Martin Luther stood on the Bible, God's Word. That is where I want to stand. I read the Bible personally and hear it read in church. In church the reading of the Scriptures is introduced with, "Listen to (or for) the Word of God." The

reading is ended with, "This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God." Never have I read or heard a word in Scripture that allowed a violation of the standard of faithfulness between a man and a woman in marriage or chastity in singleness. I read lots of words in the Bible about the violation of the standard, but never approval of the violation. The standard of "fidelity and chastity" was violated by many, including Abraham, Jacob, Judah, David, Solomon, and Christians in the Corinthian Church. The Bible describes the dreadful consequences of breaking the standard but never gives approval or a blessing. Now we are repeatedly asked to delete the standard.

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one." The 7th Commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." There are some who would say, "I have never broken that one, I was chaste in singleness and faithful in my marriage." These same persons can also point their fingers at those who have not kept the commandment. I remember an English professor at Macalester College. He was sharp and insightful. We read great works of literature including the Sermon on the Mount in the Bible. We discussed the Sermon on the Mount in class and came to the verses where Jesus quoted the 7th Commandment and then said, if you look at someone with lust you have already committed adultery in your heart. The usually talkative, inquisitive class sat in silence, focused on the professor and intent on what he would say. His response to Jesus' words was this, "That gets us all, doesn't it." No one voiced a disagreement. We all have broken and violated God's standards, but that does not make it right to eliminate the standard of "fidelity and chastity."

One important contributor to our long tradition of upholding the standard of "living either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness" is our own John Calvin. He writes in many places in the Institutes of the Christian Religion about marriage and singleness. In particular he describes the Biblical principles that govern marriage and singleness in his interpretation of the 7th Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Calvin maintains marriage is to be a faithful bond between a man and a woman, that singleness requires not celibacy but chastity. In a quote he says, "It is clear that any other union apart from marriage is forbidden in God's sight." In addition, John Calvin says these things about the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit is recognized in his agreement with Scripture." "The Word and Spirit belong inseparably together."

Whether it's the 7th Commandment or any other commandment from God, sometimes people react against them. The commandments are thought to be too negative or restrictive, too narrow or confining. A recent devotional in *The Secret Place* for April 2, 2011 gives a new appreciation of the worth and value of God's commandments. The verse for the day was Psalm 119:47, "I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love." After a poignant personal example on how obeying a human law he didn't like, once protected and saved his life, the writer concluded, "The Lord's commandments no longer

seem like ruthless restrictions. God gave them out of love for us." Therefore, we delight in them and love them.

If Amendment 10-A is passed, the message to the church and changing world will be this: We are breaking with Scripture and the past. The church will be joining the ranks of the changing world, conforming to the culture. What is our culture becoming? Our culture is becoming what once described a time in ancient Israel when the people did "what was right in their own eyes" and not what was pleasing to God, and not what was right according to the Word.

I want to follow the Holy Spirit into a changing world. I am not as bold and fearless as I should be. I believe the Holy Spirit is always consistent with Scripture, convicting us of sin, convincing us of our wonderful Savior, calling and transforming us to be like Christ, and equipping us for faithful, obedient service. And there are some things that never change: The nature of God does not change. The Word of God has not changed. The moral law has not changed. The way of salvation has not changed. Jesus Christ has not changed. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."