

Civil Marriage

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Marriage is an ordinance of creation, and not an ordinance of cult (the word refers to a form of worship, not necessarily negative). It is fundamentally different from something like baptism and communion.

Baptism and communion were established in the context of cult, and therefore must be associated with the proper cult. For this reason, Catholic baptism and communion do not count. If I remember correctly, Calvin suggested that a person who has been baptized under Catholicism does not need to be baptized again. I disagree. That person has never been baptized. A Mormon or a Buddhist can throw a bucket of water on me, but that does not amount to Christian baptism. I deny that Catholics are Christians, and therefore I deny that Catholic baptism is Christian baptism. So I oppose many Reformed and other Christians on this matter.

It is said that the legitimacy and efficacy of the rite are associated with the faith of the recipient. I agree, but if the person considers non-Christian baptism legitimate, then his faith is defective. Thus Catholic or Mormon baptism is never Christian baptism, because the person who willingly receives this baptism cannot be a Christian, so that both the cult and the faith are false. As for infant baptism, the issue of the recipient's faith may be irrelevant at the time of baptism; however, if the Church of Satan can baptize an infant, and the baptism is considered legitimate when the recipient matures and looks back with the proper faith, then is it necessary to be baptized in any church at all? The parents can perform the rite well enough at their own kitchen sink. In any case, baptism by the Church of Satan is not Christian baptism and can never become Christian baptism.

In some of their confessions, the Reformed has codified the policy that only duly ordained ministers can perform baptism or serve communion. This is utter nonsense. There is zero biblical basis for this. Rather, the Bible says that all Christians are priests in Christ, and since we are priests, and since there is no explicit exception stated, then at least in principle even a Christian woman or child can perform baptism and serve communion, just like any priest has the authority to declare and dispense the graces of the deity he serves. It seems that the only thing forbidden to women is official or governmental authority in the church. Big difference. For the sake of church order, some individuals, most probably the ministers, are designated to perform baptism and serve communion, but this does not mean only they have the authority to do it.

The Reformed are rather inconsistent and hypocritical about this. They strongly assert the priesthood of all believers, and on this basis they declare that all vocations are holy, even as holy as the gospel ministry. This is rubbish, since no priest can make prostitution holy. And if plumbing is just as holy as preaching, then why is it that both the plumber and the preacher must preach the word of God to the world? Why not just do more plumbing? But the preacher is not remiss if he does no plumbing at all.

Rather, the proper application is that since all believers are priests, all believers possess the authority of priests and can perform the functions of priests. Entirely independent from the church and other believers, Christians have direct access to God through Jesus Christ, and they can administer – yes, even women – the gifts of God under Jesus Christ. It is a denial of the priesthood of all believers to limit priestly functions to so-called "ordained" ministers – as if there is an elite class of believers, which is precisely the thing that the Reformers claimed they opposed. There is no super-priesthood within or above the believer's priesthood.

Marriage is different, because it is not associated with any cult. Rather, what "makes" a marriage is the agreement between a man and a woman that they will form such a relationship. God is the only necessary witness, and he is the witness to every marriage, whether or not he is acknowledged. The first marriage had no third human witness. There was no state and no church, unless we use the word "church" so loosely that Adam and Eve counted as the church. Even then, we perceive a difference, since there was no formal cult.

Thus no state and no church can create or destroy a marriage – the relationship has no necessary relationship with them, but it is formed only between the man and the woman before God. The state and the church can only acknowledge the agreement between the man and the woman, and the agreement still stands even if the state and the church refuse to acknowledge it. The church must be especially careful to remember this – it has no mystical power to form a union, so it must not claim to have such power.

The implication is consistent with what (I hope!) most people already acknowledge. We acknowledge that non-Christian couples are indeed married, no matter how the marriage occurred. If they say they are married, then we believe that they are, and we expect them to behave as if they are married, so that all biblical principles concerning marriage apply, including male leadership, female submission, prohibitions against adultery, and so on.

If the man runs off with another woman and marries her, we would not shrug and say, "Well, he was unmarried in the first place, so he did nothing wrong." No, we would say that he was already married, and thus he has committed adultery, and polygamy. In other words, it does not matter whether a couple marries under a state, church, or even a voodoo ceremony – if they agree that they are married, they are married. The ceremony is just a formality added on to the actual marriage agreement. Thus a man and a woman married under Catholicism do not need to be married again, because they were not married by Catholicism, but by their own agreement. Of course the Bible includes records of marriage ceremonies, but as history, not as a doctrine teaching that those ceremonies are necessary to make a marriage. What *God* has put together, let no man pull asunder – man has no power to do either.

Christians regard marriage as special and spiritual. I agree. However, this does not permit the church to make it into something that it is not. It is not a sacrament. It is an agreement instituted in creation, not cult. To reserve some special power to the church to "make" a

marriage union is Catholic thinking. It would be very hypocritical for Protestants, and especially the Reformed, to disagree with what I am saying here.

No human ceremony is strictly necessary beyond the agreement of the man and the woman. Nevertheless, when we live in a society, there are often ceremonies and procedures added on top of that basic marriage agreement so that the relationship can be recognized in that society, and so that the couple can function as a married unit. This is why we register with the government. Thus state marriage is acceptable, because no state or church really makes the marriage.

Some Christians might be uncomfortable with this, but the unease is due to human traditions. The position asserted does not loosen the standard of marriage, but makes it strict, honorable, and universal. It affirms that God holds all marriages accountable, not only those that were performed in a church. He holds all non-Christian marriages to biblical standards, and of course, they can never live up to it.

Any person considering civil marriage should settle this on the basis of the word of God, defying human tradition, so that his conscience may line up with the truth, and then he will be free to act boldly and unashamed.