

A Biblical Case: Calvin and the 3 Marks, Presbyterianism and the Book of Order

- Matthew 16:18-19
 - And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
- Matthew 18:15-20
 - "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
- Matthew 5:23-25
 - "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."
- 2 Timothy 4:1-5
 - In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.
- Galatians 6:1
 - Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.
- Jude 20-25
 - But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.
- James 2:12-13
 - Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11
 - But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

A Recent History of Ordination Standards in the PC USA

- The Authoritative Interpretation of 1978
 - The biblical revelation to Israel, reaffirmed in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, portrayed in the theology and human creation, specifically reflected in the ethical teaching in both the Old and New Testaments, and confirmed in nature, clearly indicates that genital sexual expression is meant to occur within the covenant of heterosexual marriage. For the church to ordain a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be to act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ. The repentant homosexual person who finds the power of Christ redirecting his or her sexual desires toward a married heterosexual commitment, or finds God's power to control his or her desires and to adopt a celibate lifestyle, can certainly be ordained, all other qualifications being met.
- The Fidelity and Chastity Clause 2001
 - Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
- The Peace, Unity, and Purity Report 2006
 - The PUP's final report, to the 2006 Assembly, included an "authoritative interpretation" (AI) of G-6.0108 of the *Book of Order*, which affirmed the church's standards for ordination but revived the 18th-century practice of allowing candidates for ordination to declare a "scruple" (conscientious objection) to any constitutional provision. According to the AI, it is the responsibility of the ordaining body (presbyteries for ministers, congregations for elders and deacons) to determine whether the declared scruple is a significant enough departure from "scriptural and constitutional standards for fitness for office" to be disqualifying. Before adopting the PUP report, the Assembly added an additional qualification to the AI, requiring ordaining bodies to determine "Whether the examination and ordination and installation decision comply with the Constitution of the PC (USA)." *General Assembly Backgrounder*, Jerry Van Marter, Presbyterian News Service, 5/29/2008
- The Authoritative Interpretation of 2008
 - "The 218th General Assembly (2008) affirms the authoritative interpretation of G-6.0108 approved by the 217th General Assembly (2006). Further, the 218th General Assembly (2008), pursuant to G-13.0112, interprets the requirements of G-6.0108 to apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Section G-6.0108 requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination. However, the examining body is not required to accept a departure from standards, and cannot excuse a candidate's inability to perform the constitutional functions unique to his or her office (such as administration of the sacraments)."
- The New Form of Government, 2011, G-2.0104b
 - Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.
- The PC USA's policy is local ordination with national recognition
 - Ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to ordered ministry. G-2.0701
- The Book of Worship on Marriage
 - Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. *Directory for Worship*-4.9001

A Church Court Case Summary on Ordination and Marriage Issues

- Reverend Stephen Van Kuiken of Cincinnati Ohio was removed from his position by the Presbytery of Cincinnati for performing same-sex union ceremonies and defying the Constitution by ordaining actively practicing homosexuals. The Synod of the Covenant Permanent Judicial Commission restored him to his position, in effect condoning his actions, but he refused to take his position back.
- Reverend Janet Edwards of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania performed a same sex wedding for a lesbian couple. This is expressly forbidden in the PC USA Constitution. The General Assembly Permanent Commission ruled that there is no such thing as a “same-sex marriage” according to Pennsylvania law. Therefore, Reverend Edwards may have called what she did a same-sex wedding but since such things do not exist in the state of Pennsylvania, she did not violate the Constitution.
- Reverend Paul Capetz is an openly gay seminary professor in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota. Reverend Capetz stated that he is openly gay, sees nothing biblically wrong him expressing his sexuality in that way and that he would continue to do so if the opportunity arose, though he was not currently in a relationship. When applying for ordination, he refused to comply with G-6.0106b stating that refused to take a vow of celibacy. The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ruled that even though he said that he would not abide by the Constitution in the future, he technically was abiding by it now and therefore must be allowed to be ordained.
- Reverend Doctor Jane Spahr has been acquitted before on charges that she has performed same sex union/marriage ceremonies but did so again for approximately 16 same sex couples before Proposition 8 was approved. She was found guilty, “rebuked,” and enjoined “to avoid such offences in the future.” Upon appeal, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission upheld her conviction, but included the following opinions along with the ruling: *“The best solution is for the General Assembly to amend the definition of marriage to authorize teaching elders and commissioned ruling elders to preside at the marriages of same-sex couples in civil jurisdictions that recognize such marriages as legal. The definition now found in W-4.9001 was never designed for these circumstances. It was adopted in a world where same sex marriages were inconceivable. By retaining that definition despite the increasing number of jurisdictions recognizing same-sex marriage, the church creates a form of second class citizenship for faithful Christians despite all the other places in the Book of Order where the full equality of persons regardless of sexual orientation is affirmed. I encourage the General Assembly to so act.”* And, *“Since the Directory for Worship is part of our constitution and the majority has found that it may give rise to disciplinary cases, then it should be immediately amended to clearly state that we fully welcome the LGBT community into their rightful place in our church, including allowing them to marry.”* According to the L.A. Times, “Spahr said she would continue to marry gay and lesbian couples regardless of the verdict by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the church's version of the U.S. Supreme Court.” Honorably retired, she remains in good standing with her presbytery.
- Olympia Presbytery voted to make G-6.0106b an essential of Reformed polity. Several Presbyters challenged this vote by the Presbytery. The Synod Permanent Judicial Commission upheld the vote of the Presbytery but the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission overturned the vote and directed the Presbytery to fully correct the action. The result is that the Presbytery was unable to declare a portion of the Constitution an essential of Reformed polity. This means that the Constitution itself can be scrupled.

Examples of PC USA Discipline with Ministers and our Beliefs

- Rita Nakashima Brock, told a Re-Imagining god Gathering in Minnesota in June, 2003 that Christians are wrong to believe Jesus died for their sins. Weeks later it was announced that she would be the keynote speaker at a denomination-sponsored event for women at the Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina. In announcing Brock's role in the August 2003 conference, the Office of Women's Advocacy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) described her as a "noted public speaker" who has "lectured and preached around the world." While also saying that Brock is the co-author of *Proverbs to Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us*, the PCUSA women's office did not mention that her book denies that Christ died on the cross as an atonement for sin. Neither did it mention that Brock is one of the leading figures in the Re-Imagining god movement that the 1994 General Assembly declared "beyond the bounds of the Christian faith."
- Lisa Larges of San Francisco Presbytery bills herself as a lesbian evangelist. She has asked repeatedly to be ordained to the office of evangelist for the interest group *That All May Freely Serve*. She was approved for ordination in 2009 by the Presbytery of San Francisco, despite her clear statements that she would not abide by the Fidelity/Chastity requirements of the Book of Order. The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ultimately upheld her ordination, stating that "(The) vast diversity of interpretation of scripture and the confessions regarding human sexuality evident in the record is also manifest across the churches and members of the denomination... This range of interpretations reached through thoughtful and prayerful discernment is, in itself, evidence that the candidate's departure cannot be from an essential of Reformed faith and polity. Disagreements over particular passages of scripture and confessions, and their interpretation in light of scripture and confessions as a whole, preclude designating such passages as somehow uniquely central to determining the fitness and faithfulness of a candidate for office." In other words, if there is disagreement about any doctrine, it can't be considered essential.
- An excerpt from a sermon by Pastor Carol Howard Merrit during Holy Week 2010: "*Do we serve a divine being that needs blood to forgive? And, even more disturbing, would we worship a Creator who would require the sacrifice of God's son to extend mercy? That sort of reckoning may have made sense in ancient times, but now it puts into question the nature and character of God. Is God vengeful? Does God need payment for wrongs that have been committed? Is God bloodthirsty? Is God some sort of divine child abuser, a being who needs to see his own Son suffer so that our wrongs might be paid for? This idea of the divine is quite disturbing, so many progressive Christians question the nature of this reckoning, and we see the sacrificial system as something that humans needed.*" Carol Merrit is a Minister member of National Capital Presbytery in good standing. She pastors a Church in the Washington, DC area.
- An excerpt from John Schuck, a Minister member in good standing of Holston Presbytery in Elizabethtown, Tenn. This is from his 2010 Holy Week service message *No More Crosses*, published on his website. "*A few years ago a poster advertising Mel Gibson's movie, The Passion, featured an image of Christ wearing a crown of thorns. The caption read: Dying was his reason for living. The movie itself was about his supposed last hours cobbled together from the various fictional accounts in the gospels. The four gospels that made it into the canon of holy scripture all contain a version of Jesus' trial and execution. In fact over half the gospel material has to do with his death. Why are we so obsessed with this man's death? Dying was his reason for living. Really? The belief that Jesus died for us or died for our sins or died to save us has been Christianity's theological centerpiece. His death and resurrection are two parts of this mythology. That mythology has little to do with the historical person of Jesus. Details about the trial and crucifixion are literary memes taken from other sources. It isn't that the gospel writers observed what happened and wrote it down. It is what we would call, for lack of a more sophisticated word, fiction.*" In December 2011 Schuck was elected clergy commissioner to the upcoming General Assembly.

The Ministry of Proclamation in the PC USA

- Eleanor Giddings Ivory was head of the PC USA Washington Office for many years. This is the lobbying arm of our denomination. Her causes included speaking in favor of government funded abortion, euthanasia as the law of the land, pro-Palestinian legislation, same-sex unions and marriage legislation and pledging the support of our denomination for the Health Care Bill. The newly appointed head J. Herbert Nelson serves on the Board of the Covenant Network, another advocacy group promoting the homosexual agenda within the PC USA. The Washington Office speaks with the full authority of the whole denomination in its lobbying efforts in Washington DC.
- The Stated Clerk's office of the PC USA also makes proclamations on behalf of the whole denomination. These proclamations have been in line with the proclamations of the Washington Office. There is a reason for this. Both the Stated Clerk's Office and the Washington Office take their proclamation orders from the General Assembly. Policy statements do not need to be ratified by the Presbyteries. They can simply be approved by the GA and then proclaimed as PC USA policy.