

MARRIAGE

Psalm 112 • Proverbs 3:1–12 • Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXIII

PSALM	Psalm 112:3 “Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.”
READING	Proverbs 3:5–6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”
BOOK OF CONCORD	Apology Article XXIII: The Marriage of Priests

The Texts

Psalm 112 is a portrait of the man whose household is built on the fear of the Lord. He is gracious and lends; he conducts his affairs with justice; his righteousness endures forever; his children will be mighty in the land; wealth and riches are in his house. This is not a monastery; it is a household. The man of Psalm 112 has a wife, children, financial responsibilities, and civic relationships, and in all of them his fear of God is the animating principle. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIII, argues that this man is not a lesser Christian for living in the married estate. He is a practitioner of a vocation the Apology insists is as pleasing to God as any monastic office. Proverbs 3 is a father’s instruction to a son he is sending into the world. Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him. Honor the Lord with your firstfruits. Do not despise the Lord’s discipline. This is domestic theology: the transmission of wisdom across generations in a household, from a father who knows the Lord to a son who is learning to walk with Him. Apology XXIII’s defense of marriage as a divine ordinance is the doctrinal form of what Proverbs 3 assumes: that the domestic estate, with its instruction and its obligations and its ordinary relationships, is the primary school of Christian character, not its obstacle.

Discuss: *Psalm 112’s man of God has a household, children, wealth, and civic responsibilities, and in all of them his righteousness endures. Proverbs 3’s father transmits wisdom to a son in the context of a domestic relationship. Apology XXIII argues these men are not spiritually inferior to celibates. What specific cultural or ecclesiastical assumption in your congregation still, even subtly, treats domestic life as a spiritual distraction rather than a divine vocation?*

Key Terms

Term	What It Means
Natural right	The Apology’s term for the divine ordinance of marriage: an ordinance impressed upon nature by God Himself, not a human custom that can be removed by human law or monastic vow. Because it is immutable and divinely created, no ecclesiastical authority can abolish it.
Marriage sanctified by the Word	The Apology’s definition of purity in marriage. In believers marriage is pure because it has been sanctified by the Word of God and faith. True purity is not physical celibacy but purity of heart, and a married Abraham or Jacob may possess greater purity of heart than a continent monk.
Orator vs. architect	Melanchthon’s analogy for why virginity does not merit more justification than marriage. An orator is not more righteous than an architect because of his specific skill. A virgin does not merit justification by virginity more than a married person merits it by conjugal duties. Both are called to their specific vocation.
Doctrine of demons	The Apology’s citation of 1 Timothy 4:1–3 against the forced prohibition of marriage. Compelling celibacy destroys a divine ordinance, leads to infinite scandals and corruption of public morals, and suppresses the knowledge of Christ and God’s actual gifts.

Discuss: *The Apology’s orator-and-architect analogy says that a virgin does not merit more justification than a married person any more than an orator is more righteous than an architect. Both are called to their specific vocation and both are justified freely for Christ’s sake. How does that analogy apply to the contemporary tendency to assign higher spiritual status to full-time church workers, missionaries, or those in formal ministry than to those who serve God as parents, spouses, and employers?*

Marriage as Divine Ordinance

Apology XXIII's opening argument is from creation and natural law. Against adversaries who treated marriage as a spiritual concession to human weakness, Melancthon argues from Genesis 1:28 that the desire of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance. Marriage is not a social arrangement that the Church permits on sufferance; it is an ordinance divinely impressed upon human nature by God's own creative act. This means marriage is a natural right: an immutable, God-created institution that no human law, ecclesiastical decree, or monastic vow can remove or supersede. The Apology's practical target is the requirement of clerical celibacy, which it treats not as a defensible discipline but as a violation of the divine order. A man who has been ordained cannot be required to suppress what God wove into his nature at creation by any authority below God's. Proverbs 3's father is practicing a vocation that the Apology argues God permanently inscribed in the structure of human life. The man of Psalm 112 whose house is established and whose righteousness endures is not succeeding despite his domestic estate; he is succeeding through it, in the very estate God designed for him.

Discuss: *The Apology argues that marriage is a natural right divinely impressed upon human nature, which no ecclesiastical authority can remove or prohibit. The practical target is forced celibacy, but the underlying argument is about the status of the married estate as a divine ordinance. How does the Apology's argument change the way a congregation thinks about the choice to marry, to remain celibate, and to honor both as genuine vocations rather than treating one as holier than the other?*

Redefining Purity

The adversaries' claim against married clergy was that those who minister the Sacraments ought to be pure, with the implication that marriage is an impurity incompatible with sacred office. Melancthon's response is to redefine the entire category of purity. Citing Titus 1:15, "Unto the pure all things are pure," the Apology declares that in believers marriage is pure because it has been sanctified by the Word of God and faith. The impurity of the adversaries' virginity is the impurity of hypocrisy and self-justification; the purity of the married believer is the purity of a heart that trusts Christ.

Melancthon presses the point with specific historical examples: Abraham and Jacob, both married men, both practitioners of a domestic estate that included wives, children, flocks, servants, and the full complexity of household life. The Apology argues that a married man of this kind can possess greater purity of heart than most of those who are even truly continent, for the simple reason that purity before God is not physical celibacy but mortified concupiscence and trust in Christ. Psalm 112's man whose righteousness endures forever is not pure despite his household; he is pure within it, because the Word of God has sanctified every part of his domestic life.

Discuss: *The Apology redefines purity as purity of heart through faith in Christ, not physical celibacy, and argues that a married Abraham or Jacob can be purer before God than a continent monk. How does that redefinition change the way your congregation thinks about what constitutes a holy life, and where in its actual piety does it still operate with the adversaries' definition of purity as a function of what one refrains from?*

Against Angelic Worship

The Apology's most culturally pointed charge is against what it calls angelic forms of worship: the elevation of practices that leave behind the earthly, domestic, and creaturely in favor of a spirituality that imagines itself to have transcended the created order. The medieval requirement of celibacy was built on the assumption that domestic life is a spiritually inferior estate that the truly holy person escapes. The Apology calls this a doctrine of demons, citing 1 Timothy 4:1–3's description of those who forbid marriage as a demonic teaching, and argues that its practical consequence is the infinite scandals and corruption of public morals that the church actually produced by enforcing it.

The positive argument is that God has assigned specific vocations to specific people, and that the faithful execution of an assigned vocation, however mundane, is more pleasing to God than the self-chosen disciplines of those who imagine themselves to have moved beyond created life. Proverbs 3's father transmitting wisdom to a son, Psalm 112's householder whose righteousness endures in the midst of his ordinary domestic responsibilities, these are not spiritual underachievers. They are faithful practitioners of the vocation God assigned them. The Apology's warning against angelic worship applies directly to any contemporary form of piety that treats the ordinary obligations of married and family life as a spiritual burden to be minimized rather than a divine assignment to be honored.

Discuss: *The Apology warns against angelic forms of worship that treat domestic life as spiritually inferior and self-chosen abstinence as holier than God-assigned domestic duty. It calls the forced prohibition of marriage a doctrine of demons. In what subtle contemporary forms does your congregation still elevate a form of spirituality that implicitly treats the ordinary obligations of marriage and parenting as less pleasing to God than churchly activities, and what would it look like to take the Apology's warning seriously in your own pastoral practice?*

The Payoff

Psalm 112's man who fears the Lord and whose household is established and whose righteousness endures forever is not a model of spiritual achievement despite his domestic life. He is a model of faithfulness within it. Proverbs 3's instruction to trust the Lord in all your ways, acknowledge Him in every path, and honor Him with the firstfruits of your household is the theology that makes that man's righteousness endure. The Apology's defense of marriage as a divine ordinance, a natural right, a holy vocation sanctified by the Word and faith, is the doctrinal form of both texts' central claim: the domestic estate is not where God's people wait until they can do something holy. It is where God has assigned them to be holy, right now, in the ordinary relationships He created and sanctified.