

Letter 459: 30 December [1531, Strasbourg], Capito, Martin Bucer, and their colleagues to Simon Grynaeus

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[*Summary*]: The Strasbourgers are providing an answer to the best of their ability, but “no one can give more than he has received from heaven.” In their response they seek God’s Truth, not the interest of the state. “The king has people whom he may consult about doing everything according to his royal dignity; of us he only asks the Truth.” Grynaeus has asked them four questions concerning the legitimacy of marrying a brother’s wife: (1) Did the prohibition in Lev. 18:16 apply even if the brother was dead? (2) Do the execrations in the passage apply to Henry’s case? (3) Were Jews ever allowed to marry a brother’s wife without dispensation? (4) Does Old Testament law apply in the context of evangelical freedom? The Strasbourgers answer only the first question: It was lawful for Henry to marry his late brother’s wife, especially since “the marriage was sanctioned by secular and ecclesiastical authorities.” Furthermore, “the external laws of the Old Testamen need not be observed by us.” Earlier, they approved of a divorce in Henry’s case, if it was in the interest of the state, but they have changed their minds. Zwingli and Oecolampadius were wrong in permitting a separation. The Strasbourgers have consulted with Ambrosius Blaurer before giving their answer.