

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH – CHAPTER 24

OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Paragraph 1.

- **Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time. a.**
- Proof texts (FROM ESV)
- a. **Gen. 2:24.** Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **Matt. 19:4–6.** He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” **Rom. 7:3.** Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. **Prov. 2:17.** ...who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God;

Paragraph 2.

- **Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, b for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; c and for preventing of uncleanness. d**
- b. **Gen. 2:18.** Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” **Eph. 5:28.** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **1 Pet. 3:7.** Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.
- c. **Gen. 1:28.** And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” **Gen. 9:1.** And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. **Mal. 2:15.** A Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?⁶ And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.
- d. **1 Cor. 7:2, 9.** But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband... But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paragraph 3.

- It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. e Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. f And therefore such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies. g
- e. **Heb. 13:4.** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **Tim. 4:3.** ... who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth **1 Cor. 7:36–38.** If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. **Gen. 24:57–58.** They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” 58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.”
- f. **1 Cor. 7:39.** A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.
- g. **Gen. 34:14.** They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. **Ex. 34:16.** ...and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. **2 Cor. 6:14.** Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? **See Deut. 7:3–4; 1 Kings 11:4; Neh. 13:25–27; Mal. 2:11–12.**

Paragraph 4.

- **Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. h Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife. i**
- h. **Lev. 18:6–17, 24–30.** None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God." **Lev. 20:19.** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity. **1 Cor. 5:1.** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. **Amos 2:7.** ... those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned;
- i. **Mark 6:18.** For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. **Lev. 18:24–28.** Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you...

Paragraph 5.

- **Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. k In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: l and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead. m**
- **k. Matt. 1:18–20.** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **See Deut. 22:23–24.**
- **l. Matt. 5:31–32.** “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
- **m. Matt. 19:9.** And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”. **Rom. 7:2–3.** For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Paragraph 6.

- Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: n wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case. o
- n. **Matt. 19:8–9.** He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” **1 Cor. 7:15.** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. **Matt. 19:6.** So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”
- o. **Deut. 24:1–4.** “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.