

Week 24, Wednesday, Jun 1, 2022: Of Marriage and Divorce

“... marriage is a human contract under the limits and sanctions of a divine constitution, and the parties contracting pledge their vows of truth and constancy to God as well as to each other and to society.”⁴²⁵ Marriage is both a religious and civil contract, and the foundation of community: “Marriage lays the foundation of a family ... Like the state and the church, the family is an ordinance of God. These three are the fundamental institutions of society ... The family is more fundamental than either of the other two; for it was prior to them, and they derive their members from it. Anything therefore which safeguards or threatens the purity and permanence of the home is of vital concern to both church and state.”⁴²⁶ “A family is the seminary of Church and State ...”⁴²⁷

WCF 24:1: *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)*

(a) Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6; Prov. 2:17.

No homosexuality. Nor polygamy (nor bigamy), which is a result of the Fall, and its first instance was in the line of the reprobate (Gen. 18ff). God did not make “Adam and Steve” as the creation pattern; nor did He make “Adam and Eve and Evelyn”: “Polygamy never received God’s positive sanction.”⁴²⁸ Pay attention to perfect models in the estate of innocence for your redeemed lives, and not to imperfect sinful patterns of the present estate of sin and misery: “The original is the normal, the ideal.”⁴²⁹ “In the beginning” is to be our model, including what “was not so” (Mt. 19).

WCF 24:2: *Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, (b) for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; (c) and for preventing of uncleanness. (d)*

(b) Gen. 2:18. (c) Mal. 2:15. (d) 1 Cor. 7:2, 9.

a. Genesis informs our redeemed gender roles. Adam’s wife was created for helping him glorify God in producing covenant children (“increase ... the church with an holy seed”) in chastity. The

⁴²⁵ Hodge, 302.

⁴²⁶ Green, 185.

⁴²⁷ “Mr Thomas Manton’s Epistle to the Reader”, in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2001), 9.

⁴²⁸ Sproul, vol. 3, 30. Dickson provides a helpful list of arguments against the idea that bigamy or polygamy was ever countenanced beyond tolerance (similar to divorce): “1. ... the having of two wives, or many wives, is contrary to the first institution of marriage, for the Lord gave Adam one wife only (*Gen. 2:24*). 2. ... the law of God forbids expressly bigamy, or two wives (*Lev. 18:18*). 3. ... the Lord doth find fault sharply with polygamy, or many wives (*Mal. 2:14-15*). 4. ... Christ says, He that puts away his wife (except in the case of adultery) and marries another committeth adultery (*Matt. 19:9*). But if it were lawful to have at one time more wives than one, he should not be guilty of adultery in marrying another, whether he put away the former wife or not. 5. ... bigamy and polygamy take away the true peace of a wedded life, as is evident from the examples of Jacob (*Gen. 30*). And of Elkanah (*I Sam. 1:6*). 6. ... the invention of bigamy was the device of a wicked man, Lamech (*Gen. 4:19*)” (182-183).

⁴²⁹ Sproul, *Ibid.*

Hebrew for “helpmeet” has the idea of “counterpart,” expressing equality of value while difference in function to “fit” the whole of what Adam lacked.

b. Sex is not restricted to the purpose of procreation (Song of Solomon; 1 Cor. 7:3-5, 9). It is “Puritanical” to teach that marital sex is good and to be enjoyed for its intimate and pleasurable expression of mutual covenant love. Anthony Selvaggio points out that “the Puritans ... were instrumental in unleashing sex from the chains of medieval theology [then thought to be a necessary evil to bring children into the world] ... the Puritans were no prudes when it came to sex. In fact, Westminster Divine, William Gouge, declared that married people should engage in sexual relations ‘with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully.’”⁴³⁰ A caution: sex in marriage should be private and not casually discussed. Nonetheless, there is no sin in sexual pleasure within its proper conjugal context. The sin is when sex is outside of wedlock: “True love involves commitment.”⁴³¹

WCF 24:3: *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; 1 Tim. 4:3; 1 Cor. 7:36-38; Gen. 24:57-58. (f)1 Cor. 7:39. (g)Gen. 34:14; Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:4; Neh. 13:25-27; Mal. 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 6:14.

a. Marriage can be arranged, but with consent (Gen. 24), with only religious barriers (Acts 17:26).
b. Celibacy and singleness (while recommended by Paul in 1 Cor. 7) is not more holy than marriage.
c. No Christian may be “unequally yoked” with a non-Christian (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Genesis 6:1-3)⁴³²: “To keep this command one needs to avoid situations which will create difficulty in obedience – such as dating a person who is not eligible religiously.”⁴³³ Protestants should not marry Catholics. It also is unwise for Paedo- and Credo-Baptists to wed due to the fundamental difference of raising covenant children. Especially, Calvinists should not marry Arminians. Van Dixhoorn rightly enjoins us, “Christians need to be marriage maximalists, and not marriage minimalists, as is the trend in modern Western society ... If you are a Reformed Christian, you should not marry an unreformed person of any kind ...”⁴³⁴ Also, it makes no sense for married Christians to be members of and participate in different congregations: remember, “one flesh” applies to all of life – especially church life! Also, no noble Christian should foolishly marry someone in the Visible Church that is “notoriously” unstable in the ways of the Lord. To do so is not only sinful, but renders disastrous results for all. John Murray writes, “The children of God are the salt of the earth. When the interests of godliness do not govern the people of God in the choice of marital partners, irreparable confusion is the result and the interests, not only of spirituality, but also of morality, are destroyed. Here [Gen. 6:1-3ff] we have emblazoned on the story of the episode in the history of mankind the great principle that marital life is to be guided, not by impulse or fancy, but by

⁴³⁰ Anthony Selvaggio, *What the Bible Teaches About Marriage* (Evangelical Press: Webster, NY, 2007), 190-191. See PECA sermon on WLC Q&A 138, Part 5, “Keep Busy.”

⁴³¹ Ward, 150.

⁴³² Packer, 229: “Intimacy at its deepest is impossible when the partners are not united in faith.”

⁴³³ Ibid, 151.

⁴³⁴ Van Dixhoorn, 326.

considerations which conserve and promote the interests of godliness.”⁴³⁵ Still, once married, the covenant is binding (1 Cor. 7:13). So Pastor requires premarital counseling before he will marry anyone (and only members in our church), reflecting R.C. Sproul’s concern: “... we live in a culture where people so often get married on the basis of emotion, rather than the basis of principle.”⁴³⁶

WCF 24:4: *Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in 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) The man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own; nor the woman of her husband’s kindred nearer in blood than of her own. (k)*

(h)Lev. 18; 1 Cor. 5:1; Amos 2:7. (i)Mark 6:18; Lev. 18:24-28. (k)Lev. 20:19-21.

“‘Consanguinity’ refers to blood relations, and ‘affinity’ to the corresponding relationships among in-laws.”⁴³⁷ You may not marry closer than first cousins: it is genetically dangerous for child bearing; it is morally wrong according to the Word. Incestuous marriage vows may never be binding. The second part of this section on not marrying the sibling of a deceased spouse is difficult. The RP *Testimony* rejects it as unscriptural, (at first glance seen as contradicting the Levirate law in Deut. 25:5-10: see also Genesis 38). Van Dixhoorn informs us that “... the Long Parliament in the 1640s struck out the last line of the fourth paragraph, an action which the Scottish Kirk ignored—indeed, the Church of Scotland ignored all of the revisions to the confession of faith imposed by the English Parliament ... in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this final line came to be seen as too restrictive, and so the Americans removed it from their confession.”⁴³⁸ Nonetheless, along with other conservative Presbyterian churches in America today, we affirm the original preserved by the Scottish Church. John Murray defends the view in his *Principles of Conduct*.⁴³⁹ He explains that in Lev. 18:18; 20:14, 17, 21, “The expression ‘take a wife’ indicates that more is involved than an act of sexual intercourse.”⁴⁴⁰ Not irrelevantly, he points out that in 1 Cor. 5, the man guilty of fornication not even named among the Gentiles is specifically guilty of affinity, and that the argument being based on Leviticus shows that OT ethics still apply in the NT. He adds: “The Levirate law could well be an exception to meet a certain exigency and is quite compatible with the general provision that a man may not marry his deceased brother’s widow. The latter could be the rule, the Levirate law the exception in the extreme exigency contemplated ...”⁴⁴¹ He also notes, “That a widow can be called the wife ... of her deceased husband is easily demonstrated (cf. Genesis 38:8; Deuteronomy 25:5, 7;

⁴³⁵ John Murray, “The Marriage Ordinance”, in *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 46.

⁴³⁶ Sproul, vol. 3, 36. He adds, “Love is so much more than a warm puppy or a handful of roses and a romantic ballad. It is living out the vows that we take before God” (40). As well, “The confession teaches that divorce has to be according to the law of God, not according to the will of the participants.”

⁴³⁷ Spear, 127-128.

⁴³⁸ Van Dixhoorn, 329. He also suggests George Gillespie’s, *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions*, pp. 242-43, for more study on consanguinity and affinity.

⁴³⁹ Cited by Williamson, 184-185, who says the *Confession* is correct and historically consistent.

⁴⁴⁰ John Murray, “The Marriage Ordinance”, in *Principles of Conduct*, footnote, 49-50.

⁴⁴¹ John Murray, “Appendix B: Additional Note on Leviticus 18:16, 18”, in *Principles of Conduct*, 250.

Ruth 4:5; ii Samuel 12:10; Matthew 22:25; Acts 5:7) ... Hebrew has a word for widow ..., but it is not Old Testament usage to identify a widow as the widow of such an one. As the above instances show, it is the usage to call her the 'wife' ... of such an one."⁴⁴² More to the point: "In reference to our precise question ... the matter turns on the implications of Leviticus 16:16⁴⁴³. There a man is forbidden to marry his deceased brother's widow." A.A. Hodge points out that "All branches of the Protestant Church—Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian—have maintained the same principle in their Confessions of Faith or canons of discipline."⁴⁴⁴

WCF 24:5: *Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. (l) In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: (m) and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead. (n)*
(l)Matt. 1:18-20. (m)Matt. 5:31-32. (n)Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:2-3.

Divorce is allowed by Scripture in restricted instances, but it is a result of the Fall and never encouraged. Research shows divorce to be the number one detriment to the security of children, and its rate to increase in subsequent marriages. Marry well once, and live well married until death. When divorce occurs, notice only the "innocent party" violated by adultery is qualified to remarry.

WCF 24:6: *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 wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: (o) 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. (p)*
(o)Matt. 19:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:15; Matt. 19:6. (p)Deut. 24:1-4.

The Confession here makes a strong statement against the autonomy of married couples to frivolously divorce and destroy Church and State, and certainly would condemn "No Fault Divorce" laws. The marriage bond is serious and sacred, not to be entered into lightly, and not to be exited unbiblically (see ch. 22). Williamson explains, "... it is the duty of both Church and State to uphold the divine ordinance."⁴⁴⁵ Note John Murray's criticism here, that desertion should be allowed only by unbelievers: "The restrictions of the Confession are far-reaching when it says, 'such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate'. But the failure strictly to

⁴⁴² Ibid, 251.

⁴⁴³ This Scripture reference seems to be a typo and should be Leviticus 18:16.

⁴⁴⁴ Hodge, 307. Murray (53) refers to several works showing the classic Protestant stance, including: Calvin's *Commentary: the Four Last Books of Moses*, Vol. III, pp 96-108; *Kindred and Affinity Impediments to Marriage* (London, 1940); and *The Canon Law of the Church of England* (London, 1947) , pp 126f. "This has been the almost universal belief of the Christian Church in all past ages ... The Synod gives public notice to all concerned that the Ministers of the Church shall not be at liberty to perform marriage except in strict conformity with the Confession of Faith, and that Church privileges shall not be extended to any who contract marriage under the license given by the said Deceased Wife's Sister Act." Appendix VIII, "Resolutions Relating to Church Privileges, 1. Protest Against the Deceased Wife's Sister Act", in *The Practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, 158-159. See also PECA's sermon on Leviticus 18:6-18, "Protect Your Family in the Lord."

⁴⁴⁵ Williamson, 184.

confine the liberty of dissolution to the precise conditions prescribed by the apostle in this passage must be recognized, and the loophole left thereby cannot be maintained on the basis of Scripture.”⁴⁴⁶

Some concluding remarks.

a. Don't take entering into marriage lightly, take living in marriage seriously, and do not consider “divorce” in all situations as your go-to back-up plan. If you are asking about what ways you can get out of marriage, you are asking the wrong question of hard-hearted Pharisees (See PRPC sermons on Matt. 5:31-32, “Marriage is Meant to be Permanent” and Matt. 19:1-10, “Never Give Up On Your Marriage!”)

b. You should rather be asking, how do I forgive and invest in preserving my marriage to honor the Lord? Also, notice that a sin forbidden by the seventh commandment (WLC 139) is “unjust divorce, or desertion”. Remarriage in all cases is not your right; King Jesus restricts divorce and remarriage, the latter being what is actually the cause of “adultery” in Mt. 19. If these restrictions seem harsh, it is because you live in a wicked culture. God says not to put asunder what He Himself joins in marriage, and He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Pastor will be very careful with marriage and remarriage.

c. If your marriage is struggling, please seek pastoral support through marriage and family counseling (discipleship) in the Word; help can be had, and prevention is worth its wait in gold.

d. The *Confession* here is not promoting divorce, but giving restrictions to it to preserve marriage: “The emphasis in these sections is not to make divorce easy, but to stress the permanence of marriage.”⁴⁴⁷ The Church should be careful to preserve the sanctity of marriage by not countenancing unbiblical dissolutions of it for ungodly “remarriages”. Gordon Clark soberly states, “... when the civil law allows divorce for looking cross-eyed or for dyeing the hair another shade, the law of God is violated. Christians therefore and all church courts are obligated to treat such divorces as illegal and as null and void. If people so divorced marry again, the Church must regard them as living in adultery and cannot receive them into fellowship.”⁴⁴⁸ A.A. Hodge concurs: “... if the parties to a marriage unrighteously dissolved marry again, they are to be regarded and treated by those who fear God as living in those new marriages in the sin of adultery.”⁴⁴⁹ Divorce is against God's creative and redemptive purpose: “Divorce in every case is a confession of defeat, an acknowledgement of failure. The Bible *allows* divorce, not approves it. Moses' law was a regulation, not a justification of divorce. He *suffered* the putting away, but *commanded* the bill of divorcement.”⁴⁵⁰

e. Heed your responsibility regarding the seventh commandment to preserve marriages. WLC 138 says your duties include, “watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses ... modesty in apparel ... and conjugal love”. WLC 139 says sins forbidden include, “all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks ... immodest apparel ... lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays”. In summary, WSC 71 and 72 make it clear it is your duty to preserve your own and your neighbor's chastity in thought, word, and deed. If you look on someone lustfully (or draw lustful looks), you are guilty of adultery.

f. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin, and singleness is honorable as much as married life is. As Jesus is your true spiritual Husband, and marriage to Him will never be dissolved, not even in death,

⁴⁴⁶ John Murray, *Divorce* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1961?), 77.

⁴⁴⁷ Spear, 128.

⁴⁴⁸ Clark, WPB, 93.

⁴⁴⁹ Hodge, 308.

⁴⁵⁰ Green, 185-186.

be sure to find your sense of value and joy in your marriage union and communion with Christ. If people considering, entering into, or living in marriage would heed these words, there would be much less rampant divorce, and much happier living. Here are a few very pastoral thoughts from the *RP Testimony* that goes alongside the WCF as it relates to being single:

- 1. Marriage is an ordinance of God; however, to be unmarried is also an equally honorable state, and it may be the will of God for a person to remain single. Every effort should be made to submit to the direction of God in this matter, and to maintain a chaste and obedient life style. 1 Cor. 7:7-8.
- 17. *We deny* that marriage is a more spiritual state than the single life, or that it is necessary for eternal salvation. 1 Cor. 7:7-8.
- 18. *We deny* that marriage is necessary for officers in the Church. 1 Cor. 7:7.⁴⁵¹
- g. Finally, this chapter on marriage is so important, because “The family is to be a community of teaching and learning about God and godliness ... The building of strong family life must always be a priority in our service to God.”⁴⁵²
- h. See the handout by Pastor’s Greek professor, per his request, on Matthew 19:3-10.
- i. This verse is worth closing on, Heb. 13:4: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.
- j. Matthew Henry’s famous quote: “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

Some concluding thoughts from Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, on the Seventh: “*The thing implied is that the ordinance of marriage should be observed* (152). “God instituted marriage in paradise; he brought the woman to the man. Gen. ii 22. He gave them to each other in marriage. Jesus Christ honoured marriage with his presence. John ii 2. The first miracle he wrought was at a marriage, when he turned the ‘water into wine.’ Marriage is a type and resemblance of the mystical union between Christ and his church. Eph v 32. (153)” “The special duties belonging to marriage, are love and fidelity ... In marriage there is a mutual promise of living together faithfully according to God’s holy ordinance” (153). “[Adultery] is a breach of the marriage-oath. When persons come together in a matrimonial way, they bind themselves by covenant to each other, in the presence of God, to be true and faithful in the conjugal relation” (154). “That which makes adultery so sinful is, that it is needless. God has provided a remedy to prevent it. ‘To avoid fornication let every man have his own wife.’ I Cor vii 2 ... to keep ourselves from the sin of adultery. ‘Let every man have his own wife,’ says Paul ... I Cor vii 2” (155). “To avoid fornication and adultery, let every man have a chaste, entire love to his own wife ... It is not having a wife, but loving a wife, that makes a man live chastely” (160). “Pure conjugal love is a gift of God, and comes from heaven; but, like the vestal fire, it must be cherished, that it go not out” (161).

Suggested Readings:

- Besides the PRPC sermons mentioned above on Matthew 5 and 19, see “Sexual Sins Always Sink Lower”: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=10515159252> and “Let Us Neither Commit Fornication”: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=102818165201>
- “The Song of Solomon” (in the Bible)

⁴⁵¹ See Pastor’s sermon on Genesis 35:8, “God Honors a Single Woman’s Service”, on sermonaudio.com.

⁴⁵² Packer, 233. Van Dixhoorn also emphasizes that “God sees Christian families as an important part of church growth” (325).

- *Preparing for Dating and Marriage: A 31-Day Family Devotional*, Cory Griess. See Pastor's review of this book here: <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/preparing-for-dating-and-marriage>
- *Divorce*, John Murray
- "The Marriage Ordinance and Procreation", in *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*, John Murray
- "Marriage with a Deceased Brother's Wife, Condemned by the Laws of Nature, Scripture, and the Testimony of Churches and Nations", Chalmers Izett Paton: free online on Google Books.
- *What the Bible Teaches About Marriage*, Anthony Selvaggio
- "A Collection of Thoughts on Responsible Parenting and Its Righteous Product (Scriptures, Puritan and Reformed quotes, and some observations by secular psychologists)", by PECA, available under our Resources Tab, Practice: What Duty God Requires of Us, Christian Parenting and Covenant Children.

Assigned Reading for Wednesday, June 8, 2022: Of Church & Communion of the Saints

- WCF 25 & 26 and Scripture references
- Under our website Resources Tab, Practice: What Duty God Requires of Us, Being the Church (Government and Mutual Membership):
 - Watch "Is Church Membership Biblical?", Alan Cairns (and read Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:1, 11:28; Philemon 1-2, 16-17; Hebrews 13:7, 17 while you follow it).
 - Read "Is Church Membership Optional?", Stephen Pribble
 - Read "Do You Let People Leave Your Church Too Easily?" -- Bobby Jamieson