

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith 24.1-6 – Marriage & Divorce

- Marriage is between one man and one woman.
 - *Matthew 19: ⁴He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”*
- Polygamy is forbidden.
 - *Genesis 2: ²⁴A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*
- God gave us marriage for several reasons:
 - To help both husband and wife, and to help them help each other
 - To increase the population with legitimate children
 - To provide the Church with godly young men and women
 - And to prevent sexual immorality
- Christians should only marry other Christians (and beware of people who say they are Christians but have no fruit).
 - *2 Corinthians 6: ¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*
- Incest is forbidden.
 - *Leviticus 18: ⁶“None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness.”*
- People are sinful and will try to come up with arguments that justify breaking apart marriages that God has joined together.
 - *Malachi 2: ¹⁴... “Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? 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. ¹⁶“For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”*
- Divorce is only permitted in cases of adultery or willful desertion, as mediated by the Church and the civil authorities. The innocent spouse is free to marry again.
 - *Matthew 19: ⁸He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”*
 - *1 Corinthians 7: ¹²To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵But 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.*

Discussion Questions

1. Why does the Bible provide clear boundaries on who we should and should not marry?
2. In what ways is our culture putting pressure on the Bible's view of marriage and divorce?
3. Even when divorce is permitted, it is not always preferable. How does the Gospel shape our view of the marriage covenant?

Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 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.
2. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.
3. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. 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.
4. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. 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.
5. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.
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: 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.