

History and Survey of the Westminster Confession of Faith

Leadership College: Module 2
Part 2: The Doctrine of the Confession
Of Marriage and Divorce (ch. 24)



Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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,

1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 1 Timothy 5:11-14

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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,

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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,

Children as “legitimate”

- Legal term dealing with traditions/laws of men
- Condemning the moral sins of fornication/adultery
 - Putting the onus and judgment on the child rather than the parent
 - And yet, recognizing the Scriptures’ condemnation of:

visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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;

1 Corinthians 7:14; Galatians 3:29;
Ephesians 6:4

For 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.

if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

Original 1643 edition

4. Marriage ought not to be within the degree of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in 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.

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.

1887 American Presbyterian revision

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.

Leviticus 18

⁶ *“None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD.*

Mother (vs. 7)
(vs. 14)

Aunt (vs. 12, 13)

step-mother (vs 8)

aunt by marriage

Sister/half-sister (vs. 9)

Step-sister/
Step-daughter (vs 17)

Sister-in-law/
Daughter-in-law (vs. 15)

Granddaughter (vs. 10)

Step-granddaughter (vs. 17)

¹⁸ *And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.*

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

Original 1643 edition

4. Marriage ought not to be within the degree of consanguinity or affinity forbidden in 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.

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.

1887 American Presbyterian revision

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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

Matthew 1:18-19

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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

Matthew 5:32

“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.”

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

1 Corinthians 7:10-15

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

To 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. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For 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. 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.

Ch. 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce

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.

