

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 29 | Marriage, Sexuality & Gender

APPLYING OUR UNION WITH CHRIST: MARRIAGE, SEX, AND GENDER

On Marriage

Key Biblical Texts: Gen. 2, Matthew 19:4-6, Eph. 5.21-33, 1Cor. 7

What is marriage? 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 19:4-6; Rom 7:3; Prov 2:17*

Why marriage? WCF 24.2. 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; Eph 5:28; 1 Pet 3:7; (c) Gen 1:28; Gen 9:1; Mal 2:15; (d) 1 Cor 7:2,9*

Who to marry? 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)... (e) *Heb 13:4; 1 Tim 4:3; 1 Cor 7:36-38; Gen 24:57-58; (f) 1 Cor 7:39*

The Purpose of Marriage - Eph. 5.31-2 - *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* Back in Gen. 2, God had Christ and the Church in mind, which is why marriage is nearly a sacrament, meant to point us to Christ.

- **How the Gospel and Marriage inform each other, from Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage*:**
 - "The Christian teaching does not offer a choice between fulfillment and sacrifice but rather **mutual fulfillment through mutual sacrifice.**"
 - **Deeper love through promising** - "Wedding vows are not a declaration of present love but a mutually binding promise of future love. A wedding

should not be primarily a celebration of how loving you feel now . . . [but] you promise to *be* loving, faithful, and true to the other person in the future, regardless of undulating internal feelings or external circumstances”

- **Truth and Love** - “The one person in the whole world who holds your heart in her hand, whose approval and affirmation you most long for and need, is the one who is hurt more deeply by your sins than anyone else on the planet. When we are first sinned against by our spouses, we use the power of truth. . . . It destroys. When we see how devastating truth-telling in marriage can be, it can push us into the opposite error. . . . Only when I know that my spouse regularly tells me the truth will her loving affirmations really change me. . . . Truth without love ruins the oneness, and love without truth gives the illusion of unity but actually stops the journey and the growth. . . . **Only if we are very good at forgiving and very good at repenting can truth and love be kept together.**” - Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*

Just Grounds for Divorce: 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 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; 1 Cor 7:15; Matt 19:6; (*o*) Deut 24:1-4]

- On remarriage, cf. Rom. 7:2-3 (“as if the offending party were dead”) & 1Cor. 7
- **Divorce is meant to be a grace for a victim**, which is why you “sue” for a divorce. In the eyes of the church, once “grounds” have been established by a church court, the victim is free to pursue legal divorce, but the church will never “prescribe” or even “recommend” divorce; the church will simply judge whether the offender’s actions (adultery or desertion) have taken place, which in effect already have voided the marriage. Thus, the church, “recognizes” that the covenant has been violated and the victim is “free” from his/her vows. The victim, even with just grounds for divorce, is also free in Christ to remain in the marriage.

What's Sex got to do with it?

God's Intent for Sex in Marriage

1. **God loves sex and knows how incredibly powerful it is** - that's why He wants us to enjoy it in the right context! Like a sharp knife - in the hands of a surgeon it's a lifesaver; in the hands of a criminal it's a murder weapon. If anything, Christians are called to value sex more, not less, than the culture. An over-sexualized culture cheapens sex, it doesn't make it better. "Casual sex is a contradiction in terms... It may seem casual, but in fact it is always profound." - Lauren Winner
 1. Consider the Song of Solomon, which is more than, but not less than, a sexual book.
 2. God never says "No" without a better "Yes" - it's not "Don't have sex!", it's "Have the best sex you can!". See WLC 138-9 on the 7th commandment. Notice also 1Cor. 7.3-5, where it's a sin to *not* give your spouse their "conjugal rights"!
 3. Sex should be an apologetic for God's existence! If Christians have a "problem of evil", atheists have a "problem of pleasure." Why is life so good and pleasurable if it's all so random?!
2. **God preserves sex for marriage**
 1. Marriage is the one place where we can be *truly "naked and not ashamed"* - in a covenant where you can be truly vulnerable, honest, and assured of unconditional love.
 2. 1Cor. 6 - sex is uniting Christ, who lives in you, to another - so, at the least, it's a huge deal, and, at the most, we can't unite Christ to just anyone!
3. **Sex is meant to naturally consummate or complete an already intimate union** - not the other way around! It's not the first step in a relationship, but the last!
 1. "Sex is a God-invented way to say to another person, 'I belong completely and exclusively and permanently to you.'" - Keller, "The Gospel and Sex"
 2. If marriage is meant to point us Christ's love for the church, so is the sexual act. The gospel should shape *how* we engage in sex with our spouse.

The Problem: How We Have Corrupted Sex

1. **Sex as Idolatry/ False Savior** - "When a young man rings the bell at the brothel, he is unconsciously looking for God." - B. Marshall

1. Take a step back and try to realize just how profoundly our view and experience of sex is shaped by our culture and media, and nearly all wrong!
 2. Sex cannot bear the weight that we want it to - we invest it with so much hope and expectation, it will only disappoint and destroy us when we do.
 3. "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." - C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"
2. **Sex as Self-Expression** - Roots in Romanticism, where the most natural desires are the most pure and the closest to who we essentially are
1. An ugly cousin to this symptom is saying that couples need to discern whether they're "sexually compatible" or not. That is a lie.
 2. *Could we be born homosexual in a way that justifies homosexual sex and marriage because it expresses who I am or how God made me?* Notice the assumptions here. If we have a desire that we have not chosen, then it must be good. That is quintessentially "Romantic", as in coming from the 18th Century movement of arts and literature.
 1. A robust Christian doctrine of original sin has much more to add to this debate. We have all sorts of desires that are not of our own personal choosing, that we ought to fight against. So a Christian can believe one is born same-sex attracted, and yet it's still sinful; though of course there are often myriad of factors that shape our sexual desires, like family of origin, personal history, etc.
 2. Note that other "orientations" of sexuality are seen as corruptions of this one-man-and-one-woman creation design, including fornication (e.g., Deut. 22:28-29), adultery (e.g., Deut. 22:22), polygamy (e.g., Gen. 4:19; 1Tim. 3:2), bestiality (e.g., Exod. 22:19), prostitution (e.g., Lev. 19:29), incest (e.g., Lev. 18:6), cross-dressing (e.g., Deut. 22:5), and same-sex intercourse (e.g., Lev. 18:22; 20:13). This does not equate them all as if they're on the same level, it just points out that hetero-sex is the God-given standard. Homosexual sex is not "more heinous" than others. For what makes some sins more heinous than others, see WLC 151.

3. **Sex as Shameful** - Platonic roots, where it's seen as dirty or base - has *wrongly* been seen as the Christian view.
4. **Sex as Manipulation** - Sex outside of marriage is unfair to yourself and your partner - you are automatically using and abusing one another if there is not the covenant of marriage that is meant to guarantee safety and even unselfishness. Sex outside of marriage is always more about yourself than your partner, it's ultimately selfish!
 1. "There must be no physical union unless there is also every other kind - a legal, economic, personal, emotional, and spiritual union. There must not be one unity without all the rest. Likewise, C.S. Lewis likened sex without marriage to tasting without swallowing and digesting." - Tim Keller, "The Gospel and Sex"
 2. "But in my memory...there still live images of acts which were fixed there by my sexual habit. These images attack me." - Augustine, *Confessions*.

How to Engage in Our World

1. Personally and interpersonally

1. ***Love, love, love*** - remember the context and the world we live in. Many who struggle with what we'd call sexual sin have only experienced the church through the media or hateful/self-righteous aberrations. We can even think of it as forms of communal repentance that we need to ask for forgiveness for the sins of our Christian brothers and sisters (as the PCA did re:racism).
2. ***Prioritize the Gospel*** - we can get people to stop any behavior, but they're still in need of Jesus!
3. ***Holy Curiosity*** - ask questions and get to know their story. No one acts in a vacuum and with no reason/motivation. Don't assume you know the reason for why anyone sins!
4. ***Pray for Wisdom and Boldness*** - for insight into your own heart, whether you confuse love for cowardice or speaking up for self-righteous virtue-signaling; and for the Holy Spirit to be at work.
5. ***Promote the Beautiful Vision of Marriage*** - the church has largely lost the "PR" battle, but the biblical view of marriage is not one of drudgery, oppression, and loveless unions. It should be a compelling vision of a life -

though not a calling for every Christian - that enables deeper love and grace.

2. **Communally in the Church**

1. How could we be a church where people feel comfortable exploring Jesus even before they agree with us on sex and marriage? Or where real sexual sins are confessed and forgiven?
2. Our biblical principles are clear on where we stand, but how can we be consistent in our hatred of ALL sin, not ones we single out, yet radical in our love of ALL people?

3. **Politically**

1. Remember the difference between the Church and State! They simply have different purposes and callings, which should change our goals for them.
 1. This is partly why uniting Christianity with any political party does damage to the Christian witness. If you can't disagree with any parts of your political party or favorite candidate, you're not listening with biblical ears.
 2. If we prioritize the gospel, we will have lower expectations for the state's ability to be moral or Christian, whatever that would mean.
 3. Promote humility in your own heart, especially on issues that you know Christians differ on. Try to ask and genuinely explore how a Christian can be motivated by Christian convictions and yet end up with different political views. Our unity in Christ should VASTLY override our political differences.
 1. For instance, a Christian who is orthodox on marriage and sex can believe for common grace reasons that the state should sanction homosexual civil unions, just as a Christian with the same biblical view can believe the state should promote only heterosexual marriage. The difference is not their biblical orthodoxy but their view of the state's purposes, which are much less clear in Scripture.