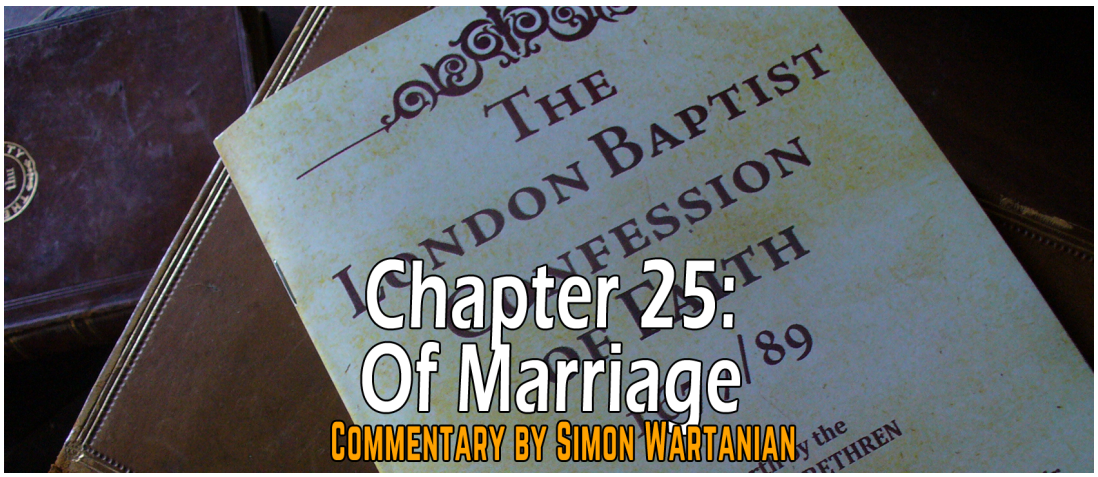
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 25: Of Marriage - Commentary

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Chapter 25: Of Marriage

What is marriage? Between how many persons is it? Is it only between a man and a woman? For what purposes did God institute marriage? May Christians marry unbelievers? Who may we marry?

§1 Monogamy Between One Man and One Woman

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. **1**
    1. Gen. 2:24 with Matt. 19:5-6;1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6; Mal 2:15[1]

Marriage is a life-long covenant between **one man and one woman** (Matt. 19:5-6) and only that. It is neither **lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time**. Monogamy is essential to marriage as defined by the Creator. The question of homosexuality, as it hot now, never crossed the minds of the framers of the Confession as it was obvious that the Bible was against it.

Marriage is a life-long covenant between a man and a woman wherein God is a witness (Mal. 2:15). It is a life-long vow (**see chapter 23 on oaths and vows**). In marriage, the man and the woman call upon God as a witness to the vows that they make to each other and bind themselves by the vow, in presence of God, to be faithful to each other. Marriage was instituted by God in the Garden, before the Fall on day six. The Lord wanted to find for Adam a mate, so He brought to him all the animals, yet "for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:20). Therefore, the LORD put Adam to sleep and made a woman from his side. The Lord created a human with the same nature as Adam's, yet, different character and with different parts which complement each other. Then we read:

> Gen. 2:22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Herein we have the institution of marriage. Adam had finally found someone like him and yet, at the same time, not *exactly* like him. The mate of Adam was to be "a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18, 20). She was to help and assist Adam, completing him. The various translations of this phrase all communicate the idea that Eve was *not* inferior in being to Adam, but was

created to compliment him and complete him. In a sense, Adam was not yet whole without Eve. Verse 20 is translated as follows:

ESV	a helper fit for him
NIV	suitable helper
ISV	companion corresponding to him
NET	companion who corresponded to him
NASB	a helper suitable for him
LXXE	a help like to himself
HCSB	helper...as his complement
KJV	an help meet for him
YLT	an helper -- as his counterpart

Adam and Eve were equal in nature, value, and being. Adam was not superior in being or value to Eve. But authority was given to Adam even before the Fall over Eve, yet this authority was not because Adam was superior in being. Albert Barnes notes on this phrase that it meant "an equal, a companion, a sharer of his thoughts, his observations, his joys, his purposes, his enterprises."[2] Matthew Henry's observation is well-known:

> That 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. Adam lost a rib, and without any diminution to his strength or comeliness (for, doubtless, the flesh was closed without a scar); but in lieu thereof he had a help meet for him, which abundantly made up his loss: what God takes away from his people he will, one way or other, restore with advantage.[3]

This Hebrew word in vv. 18, 20 means "'as over against,' 'according to his front presence' - i:e., corresponding to, his counterpart-one like himself in form and constitution, disposition, and affections, and altogether suitable to his nature and wants."[4] Matthew Poole likewise notes:

> **Meet for him**; a most emphatical phrase, signifying thus much, one correspondent to him, suitable both to his nature and necessity, one
>
> altogether like to him in shape and constitution, disposition and affection; a second self; or one to be at hand and near to him, to stand continually before him, familiarly to converse with him, to be always ready to succour, serve, and comfort him; or one whose eye, respect, and care, as well as desire, Gen 3:16, should be to him, whose business it shall be to please and help him.[5]

Adam Clarke's words concerning v. 18 are likewise of profit to note:

> *I will make him a help meet for him*; *ezer kenegdo*, a help, a counterpart of himself, one formed from him, and a perfect resemblance of his person. If the word be rendered scrupulously literally, it signifies one *like*, or as *himself*, standing *opposite to* or *before him*. And this implies that the woman was to be a perfect resemblance of the man, possessing neither inferiority nor superiority, but being in all things *like* and *equal* to himself. As man was made a social creature, it was not proper that he should be alone; for to be alone, i.e. without a matrimonial companion, *was not good*. Hence we find that *celibacy* in general is a thing that *is not good*, whether it be on the side of the man or of the woman.[6]

The woman, at the same time, was to be *like* Adam and also *unlike* him in some ways. He was not to marry someone *exactly* like him, but one who has likeness unto himself, but also differences. Before the creation of Eve, there was only one Adam and after the creation of Eve, there was only one Eve. When the Lord brings her to Adam and Adam sees that she was the one who completes him, there the Lord joins them in marriage and Adam bursts out in poetry:

> Gen. 2:23-24 Then the man said, "This at last is **bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**; she shall be called Woman, because **she was taken out of Man**." 24 Therefore a **man shall leave his father and his mother** and **hold fast to his wife**, and **they shall become one flesh**.

Adam has finally found in the woman "a helper fit for him." Therefore, Moses, the inspired author, observes that this was the

basis of marriage in v. 24. Charles J. Ellicott said "the simplest interpretation of this declaration is that the inspired narrator was moved by the Spirit of God to give this solemn sanction to marriage, founded upon Adam's words. The great and primary object of this part of the narrative is to set forth marriage as a Divine ordinance."[7] The coming together of a man and a woman, who were complimentary to each other, forms the basis of marriage. In v. 24, we may also observe the three parts which constitute marriage. 1) leaving father and mother, 2) holding fast to one's spouse, and 3) becoming one flesh.

The **first** has the main point of being independent from one's parents. When you get married, you no longer are under the authority of your parents as you were before marriage. You become independent and start your own house. You are still required to honor them, but now you are starting your own family. At this place, Calvin makes a good observation:

> The sum of the whole is, that among the offices pertaining to human society, this is the principal, and as it were the most sacred, that a man should cleave unto his wife. And he amplifies this by a superadded comparison, that the husband ought to prefer his wife to his father. But the father is said to be left not because marriage severs sons from their fathers, or dispenses with other ties of nature, for in this way God would be acting contrary to himself. While, however, the piety of the son towards his father is to be most assiduously cultivated and ought in itself to be deemed inviolable and sacred, yet Moses so speaks of marriage as to show that it is less lawful to desert a wife than parents. Therefore, they who, for slight causes, rashly allow of divorces, violate, in one single particular, all the laws of nature, and reduce them to nothing. If we should make it a point of conscience not to separate a father from his son, it is a still greater wickedness to dissolve the bond which God has preferred to all others.[8]

The **second** point concerns the complementary nature of the relationship between the wife and the husband. They hold each and they stick together. John Gill writes, "**and shall cleave unto his wife**; with a cordial affection, taking care of her, nourishing and cherishing her, providing all things comfortable for her, continuing to live with her, and not depart from her as long as they live: the phrase is expressive of the near union by marriage between man and wife; they are, as it were, glued together, and make but one; which is more fully and strongly expressed in the next clause:"[9]

The **third** point concerns their becoming one, especially in sexual intercourse. Physically they are two, but spiritually they should become of one mind and one soul. This also points to the inseparability of the man and woman in marriage. They become one and therefore, it is not lawful to disjoint them by divorce. This is what our Lord said based on citing Genesis 2 in Matthew 19:5-6. Moreover and most importantly for the purpose of this paragraph, we see in this the monogamy of marriage. There was only one Adam and one Eve from the beginning. Not multiple wives. The first polygamist was Lamech (Gen. 4:19). Polygamy was a violation of this institution of monogamous marriage from the beginning. Polygamy was tolerated by God in the Old Testament. But it is not His institution. Furthermore, marriage is between two persons of the *opposite* sex. There was one Adam and one Eve, a male and a female. Homosexuality is everywhere prohibited by the Scriptures.

When the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus concerning divorce in Matthew 19:3-9, He went back to the beginning and to the ideal picture of marriage even before the Fall. God "created them from the beginning made them male and female" and He also added, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:4-5). Then He concludes with, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6). The Lord Jesus goes back to the origin of marriage and concludes from thence not only monogamy but also, since marriage consists in the becoming one of the two, that divorce is not part of the original intent of God. Though, because of humanity's wickedness, God made provisions for divorce under the Mosaic economy (Matt. 19:7-9), yet as our Lord said, "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). Therefore, we admit without difficulty that what is said of Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and so on, in having more than one wife is not said with the approval of God, since "from the beginning it was not so." We accept that these were broken people with a lot of problems, not least their understanding of marriage. The Lord never commanded men to marry more than one wife. The narrative in Genesis 2:23-24 clearly communicates the idea of monogamous marriage. This is even more strengthened when we consider the instance when our Lord touched on this passage in Matthew 19.

As to the issue of homosexuality, it was both far away from the minds of the inspired writers of Holy Writ, as it was from the framers of the Reformed Confessions. It was not until recent times that homosexuality gained popularity and acceptance in Western culture. I do not claim that it did not exist in the ancient world, it clearly did. This is seen, among other things, from the fact that both testaments condemn it (Gen. 18; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-11). But we can conclude that any sexual relationship outside of covenant marriage between a man and a woman is sinful simply from Genesis 2.

§2 The Ends of Marriage

2. Marriage was ordained for the **mutual help of husband and wife**, **1** for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, **2** and the preventing of uncleanness. **3** (Genesis 2:18; Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9)
    1. Gen. 2:18; Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14
    2. Gen. 1:28; Ps. 127:3-5; 128:3-4
    3. 1 Cor. 7:2, 9

Marriage was ordained of God for three purposes. Firstly, **for the mutual help of husband and wife** (Gen. 2:18; Mal. 2:4; 1 Cor. 11:11-12). The beauty of marriage is that it brings two people, different from each other in function, and binds them together in a life-long covenant. All these differences between men and women, God has designed and put in place so that they would be dependent upon each other and find fulfillment in one another. Secondly, marriage was ordained **for the increase of mankind** (Gen. 1:28). As sex should only take place within a marriage covenant, so childbearing should also take place in a marriage covenant. As God had commanded Adam and Eve to multiply, so He ordained marriage to that purpose. Lastly, marriage was ordained for **the preventing of uncleanness**. This is a point taken from 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9. When every man has their own wife, that should keep them away from fornication. Sexual pleasure with one's wife is God-given and should not be shunned. But any sexual relationship outside of a marriage covenant is sinful. Therefore, marriage was given whereby sex may be enjoyed as a gift from God.

In this paragraph, the Confession describes three ends and purposes of marriage.

Complementarity

Eve was created to supplement and be a helper for Adam and we may also infer that Adam supplements and is a helper for Eve. They both complete each other and help each other as husband and wife. God says that it was *not* good for Adam to be alone. He wanted him to have a "helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). We've already discussed what this means above. Eve was to be equal to him in being and to be his counterpart, who completes him. Eve was to be someone who, at the same time, is like unto Adam and unlike him, having her distinct features so that they would help and complement each other.

Fruitfulness

Marriage was instituted "for the increase of mankind". As God blessed the animals, giving them the command to multiply and to fill the earth (Gen. 1:22), so likewise He did the same for man:

> 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."

They were to reign on behalf of God over everything He had created. They were like God and unlike all other creatures which God created. The Lord God wanted for man to multiply and spread upon the face of the earth so that His glory will be everywhere and the earth may be filled with His praise. This mandate is still valid and goes on, especially for Christians, who should raise children in the Lord, instructing them in the things of God, living the gospel before them and praying that God may grant repentance and faith to them.

Avoiding Uncleanness

The third reason is what the apostle gives in 1 Corinthians 7:9. This concerns the one who cannot keep his lust in control. They should marry and thus fulfill that desire of theirs within the lawful bounds of marriage. From here, we also see that the apostle does not instruct us to find a girlfriend and fulfill our desire with her, but rather that the person who does not have self-control in this area should *marry.* Hence we learn that every sexual bond outside of marriage is sin and not permitted by Scripture.

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§3 It Is The Duty Of Christians To Marry In The Lord

3. It is lawful for **all sorts of people to marry,** who are able with judgment to give their consent; **1** yet it is the duty of Christians to **marry in the Lord;** and therefore such as profess the true religion, **should not marry with infidels, or idolaters;** neither should such as are godly, be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresy. **2**
    1. 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Tim. 4:3; Heb. 13:4
    2. 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14

It is **lawful for all sorts of people to marry** and this marriage has to be with **their consent**, i.e., not against their will or forced. But **it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord** (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14), meaning that Christians should only marry other Christians. Therefore, Christians, who **profess the true religion, should not marry with infidels, or idolaters** neither with they who **are wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresy**. In other words, Christians should only marry other good-standing Christians. The Westminster and Savoy confessions say "infidels, Papists, or other idolaters", therefore, it is most likely that Roman Catholics are included in the category of **idolaters**, otherwise in the category of they who **maintain damnable heresy**.

It's stupid to think that it sinful for a white woman to marry a black man, or vice versa because both are children of Adam, created in the image of the one true God. But the Confession and the Bible command us to marry in the faith. I can't understand Christians who marry those who are not. To be honest, I'm often lead to questioning their commitment to the Lordship of Christ. Is Christ Lord over every aspect of your life or only some? What if your partner wants to do something that is sinful for a Christian? What if your partner wants your children to be raised in a way that is not pleasing in your or God's sight? How dominant is Christ in your life? Isn't it terrible to not be able to share the most important part of your life, your faith, with your counterpart? The principle of marrying in the Lord from 1 Corinthians 7:39 applies no less to those marrying for the second time, than for those marrying for the first time. If you are Christian, you are to marry a person who shares your faith commitment. It is a direct violation of God's command to knowingly marry an unbeliever or one from a different religion. "But…I can be an influence on him" says the girl, "and then he could come to Christ." Where is such a thing commanded in Scripture? Is Paul not clear that we should only marry in the Lord? Why find excuses? In 1 Corinthians 7:13, the apostle deals with a wife who was married to a man, yet she comes to faith and her husband is still unrepentant. Paul does not call for divorce, yet if the unbelieving partner wanted out, she may accept the divorce and be free to marry another (1 Cor. 7:15). This deals with a situation not of a believing woman marrying an unbelieving husband, but a situation when prior to Christ, they *both* were unrepentant, yet later one comes to repentance and the other remains unrepentant. In this case, divorce is still not warranted, yet, if the unbelieving partner wants out, it is lawful for the believing partner to consent if they wish. Finally, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:16 should likewise be taken into consideration. Here, he is still treating the marriage of the believing and unbelieving partners. It is as if Paul is saying that if the unbeliever wants out, let him get out because you do not have certainty that they will be saved. There is no promise of God that our unbelieving spouses will be Christians once we come to repentance. Therefore, when we take into consideration and apply it to the situation of a believer having an unbelieving girl- or boyfriend, the unlawfulness of that relationship becomes even more clear. In the first instance, there already was a marriage covenant and Paul said it is better to get out if the unbeliever wants out. So, how much more in the case when there is not yet a marriage? The fact is, while the idea of evangelizing the unbelieving partner in a marriage or love relationship may be desirable for some, it is utterly unbiblical and in direct violation of God's command.

> 2 Cor. 6:14-16 **Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers**. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial [worthlessness, unprofitableness, i.e. Satan]? Or **what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?** 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Not much needs to be said about the passage. While some maintain that this "yoking" comes even in the realm of business, no one doubts that this "yoking" in the least speaks of marriage. The unbelieving partner is not one with Christ and is, therefore, an idolater. Paul's description here is pretty black and white. He contrasts righteousness with lawlessness; light with darkness; Christ with Satan; believer with unbeliever; the temple of God with idols. This is not a minor issue. This concerns God's holy institution of life-long marriage. The nature of the ones joined together, if unequally yoked, is fundamentally different. This joining together will harm the Christian spouse in that they cannot share the most important

part of their lives with their partner. There will always be a hole and blank space in that relationship. No Christian should knowingly have a relationship with an unbeliever, much less marry one.

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§4 Marriage Ought Not To Be Within The Degrees Of Consanguinity Or Affinity

4. **Marriage ought not to be within the degrees 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. **1**
    1. Lev. 18:6-18; Amos 2:7; Mark 6:18; 1 Cor. 5:1

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman, but there are limits. It is not to be **within the degrees of consanguinity**, i.e., blood relatives or **affinity**, i.e., those related by marriage (step-brother, step-sister) as **forbidden in the Word**. **Consanguinity** defines the relationship through blood, **affinity** defines the relationship by marriage. The Mosaic law speaks about **the degrees of consanguinity** in Leviticus 18 and there are various limitations put there. Such a relationship would be **incestuous** and it will never **be made lawful**. It does not matter if a **law of man** would accept the validity of **incestuous marriages**, biblically speaking, these cannot be valid marriages. Even the **consent of** the **parties** involved does not matter. Therefore, they **may** not **live together as man and wife** since there is no valid marriage between them.

Incest is clearly forbidden from the law of Moses onward. Prior to Sinai, it was not forbidden, neither was it forbidden in the beginning, for otherwise, we could not have multiplied from one man and one woman. Therefore, it was necessary and it was not yet declared sinful until the giving of the law to Israel. See especially Leviticus 18:6-18. Furthermore, the reason why God did not create other humans than Adam and Eve (Acts 17:26) was so that Adam would represent all humanity as a covenant head. Creating others besides Adam and Eve would not have brought humanity under one head. Moreover, incest, at that time, was not biologically as problematic, as the human genetic was free from error and after the Fall it began to progressively worsen.

The word *affinity* designates a relationship by marriage and *consanguinity* a blood relationship. These types of relationships are forbidden. It is necessary for us to *not* marry those who are close relatives, like cousins or nieces. Although not prohibited by the Scriptures, these kinds of relationships often result in problems with the children. In the case of Adam and Eve's children, they were not forbidden back then because of the obvious problem with incest: the genetic problem. As the genetic code became more and more corrupted, God finally and for all following time, forbad incest at Sinai. Moreover, it should be noted in the case of Abraham, lest we too quickly condone that relationship merely because God did not speak anything about it. Let us note that Abraham was already married when God called him. Therefore, God acknowledges that half-sister marriage and blesses Sarah. But does this blessing imply that He approves of the relationship? Not necessarily. Because there was already a covenant of marriage made between the two, God would not have wanted for them to be separated now that they're joined in a covenant marriage. I may be mistaken on this, but I come from the understanding that the Bible is simply mentioning or narrating something does not directly endorse or condone the things narrated. We noted that with polygamous marriages in the Bible, whereas that was not so from the beginning. Ultimately, incest was clearly revealed as sin from Sinai onward.

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.”

(Matthew 19:4-6)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron’s Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. ^ *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
3. ^ *Matthew Henry. Commentary On The Whole Bible (Full). By default in The Word. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
4. ^ *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Full). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
5. ^ *Matthew Poole. English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
6. ^ *Adam Clarke. Commentary And Critical Notes On The Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
7. ^ *Charles J. Ellicott. Commentary For English Readers. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
8. ^ *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
9. ^ *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*