

## On Marriage and Divorce (Part 1)

Malachi 2:13-16; 1 Cor 7:36-40; WCF 24.1-3

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 7 February 2021, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)<sup>1</sup>

### Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

After about two months of preaching on other topics and texts, we are now back into the Westminster Confession of Faith.

This afternoon, we will have the first of a two-part sermon on what God's Word says about marriage.

Well, here are our sermon's three points...

- Defining Marriage
- The Purpose of Marriage
- Whom to Marry

### Defining Marriage

In Genesis 2, God's Word gives us a brief yet clear definition of what marriage is.

It says that God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, whereupon God took one of Adam's ribs, then closed again the flesh where He had taken out the rib. Then, God formed (literally, "built") that rib into a woman. And then we read the most beautiful words (Gn2:22), "...**and He (God) brought her to the man,**" i.e., *God* put them together! *He* gave them to one another!

And, of course, when Adam saw this precious creation of God – and that God had made her just for him (!) – he exclaimed (in Gn 2:23), "***This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman (Ishshah),<sup>2</sup> because she was taken out of Man (Ish).***"<sup>3</sup>

And then? What then?

Well, then, in the very next verse (Gn 2:24), God tells us, "***For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.***"<sup>4</sup>

These are the words which God Himself gave to Moses. They are God's words!

So, what do we learn from these four verses in Genesis 2?

Well, that, more than once, they make at least two things clear...

- they give us the proper gender for marriage, i.e., *male* and *female*, and...
- they give us the proper number for marriage, i.e., *one* male and *one* female.

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<sup>1</sup> In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2007. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 3: *The State, the Family, the Church, and Last Things* (Chapters 23-33 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 281p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

<sup>2</sup> In Hebrew, *Ishshah* (אִשָּׁה) – "woman."

<sup>3</sup> In Hebrew, *Ish* (אִישׁ) – "man."

<sup>4</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ge 2:24). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

So, let's focus on these two parts of the definition of marriage!

Firstly, gender: male and female:

The Genesis 2 passage makes it abundantly clear that, in the close relationship of marriage in which a man leaves his father & mother – and in which the couple becomes one flesh – God left no room for a man and a man – or for a woman and a woman – to be in the close relationship which marriage is!

So, if today, we see a man and man (or a woman and a woman) in such an intimate relationship, then we must understand that that is a result of the Fall! That is not how God first created mankind, and certainly not what He intended for marriage. Now, although God ordained marriage to be between a man and a woman, you & I have no right to kill gay people or to condemn them to hell. After all, condemning is not our task. Condemning is what God only does! So, you & I would do best to pity them and pray for them, yet all the time make it known to them (as 1 Pt 3:15 says),<sup>5</sup> *in gentleness and in godly fear*, that acting out their gay desires and even calling it a *marriage* (or *civil union*) is sin – is *missing the mark*; is not how God intended it to be.

God's definition of marriage is that it is between male and female!

Secondly, let's also look at the *number* of those whom God intended for one marriage relationship...

The four verses in Genesis (2:21-24), make it very clear that marriage is between *one* man and *one* woman.

Yes, Gn 2:24 does not say that a man shall leave his father & mother and be simultaneously joined to his *wives* (plural)! Neither does it say, two/three men shall leave their parents and be simultaneously joined to one and the same wife! No, it clearly states that “*a* man (singular) shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his *wife*” (singular).

Well, perhaps someone might say, “But, pastor, hang on!” “Genesis 2:24 is not meant for *all* human beings!” “Pastor, it was only meant for Adam and Eve, for, pastor, when God gave the command of verse 24, there still was only one couple – only one man and one woman.” “So, pastor, that's why Gn 2:24 talks of only one man and one woman!”

My brother & sister, how does one reply to such a remark?

Well, in this way: “Nice try, my friend!” “But do you realise that Adam had no parents?” “Yet, Gn 2:24 says, “...a man shall leave his *father and mother* and be joined to his wife!” “So, can you see, my friend, that the command of Gn 2:24 is not just meant for Adam & Eve, but for all of their offspring – yes, for all of mankind?”

See? God meant marriage to be between *one* man and *one* woman only!

Sadly, the Bible shows us how even God's people, sinful as they were, engaged in polygamy (when one man has more than one wife at the same time)!

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, other cultures, like the people on the Plateau of Tibet and the people of the Marquesas Islands<sup>6</sup> of the South Pacific, are

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Pt 3:15 ***But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect/fear*** (NIV 84; emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> “The Marquesas Islands (/mə:ˈrkeɪsəs/; French: Îles Marquises or Archipel des Marquises or Marquises; Marquesan: Te Henua ‘Enana (North Marquesan) and Te Fenua ‘Enata (South Marquesan), both meaning “the

practising even polyandry (when one woman has more than one husband at the same time)!<sup>7</sup>

Well, here's a question: What else is polygamy and polyandry but a sinful desire to loosen one's ties with your one and only wife – or with your one and only husband!?

Yes, what else is polygamy and polyandry but a form of adultery?

And do you remember what God's Word says about adultery?

Proverbs 2:17 says it's **forgetting God's covenant**,<sup>8</sup> i.e., forgetting that God instituted marriage as a binding contract/covenant between one man and one woman!

My brother & sister who are married (also, young people and those who will marry in future), do you remember how our Lord Jesus referred to Genesis 2 when He preached about God's pattern for marriage?

Do you remember how Christ said (Mt 19:4), "...**He who created them from the beginning made them male and female**"?

And then? What did Christ say next? Did He say, "So they are no longer *three* (or *four* or *five*), but one flesh"?

No, this is what He said (in Mt 19:6): "**So they are no longer two, but one flesh.**"

And do you remember how Christ also said (Mt 19:6), "**What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate**"?

Well so far re point 1 "Defining Marriage."

Here is point 2...

### **The Purpose of Marriage**

Well, a lot can be said about the purpose of marriage, but at its most basic level, marriage is given to us for four reasons:

- Mutual support
- Reproduction of the human race
- Church growth
- Sexual purity

Here's the first one: Mutual Support...

Well, what did Adam notice as he was doing the task God had given him – the task of naming the animals?

Well, he would certainly have noticed that although he was in a close relationship with the animals, no animal could give him the help and support he needed. For that, a wife was necessary! They were to work together in this world – mutual support!

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land of men") are a group of volcanic islands in French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity of France in the southern Pacific Ocean..." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marquesas\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marquesas_Islands)).

<sup>7</sup> "...The two best-known areas in which polyandry was studied and continued to be practiced into the 21st century are the Plateau of Tibet (a region shared by India, Nepal, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China) and the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific. In a report published in 2012, however, anthropologists Kathrine Starkweather and Raymond Hames identified 53 additional nonclassical societies throughout the world (including North America and South America) that also practice polyandry, whether formal (i.e., recognized by marriage and co-residence) or informal (when two or more men are considered the co-fathers of offspring and are invested in the care of both mother and child or children)..."

(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/polyandry-marriage>).

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 2:16-17 **To deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; <sup>17</sup>that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God** (NASB; emphasis mine)

Secondly, it was also together that they were to be fruitful and to multiply the human race. I mean, Gn 1:28 is clear: “**God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...”**”<sup>9</sup>

What can be said about that?

Well, several things...

Firstly, that sometimes (and sadly so) even some Christian couples cannot have children – and that is not outside God’s will.

But another sad thing is that some couples have *decided* to not have children. And I’m sad to say that I have seen how such couples – couples who could have children but for no good reason deliberately did not want to – have become the most selfish and to be pitied people!

As one commentator says, “...there needs to be a truly extraordinary reason for them to refuse to have children.”<sup>10</sup>

My brother & sister, gauging by Gn 1:28, God wants husbands & wives to have children – and after mutual support, *that’s* the second purpose of marriage!

But you know what? There’s a third purpose for marriage...

You see, God does not just want men and women to have children; no, He wants *His people* to have *godly* children!

And that’s why we have read Malachi 2:13-16, for, you see, in this passage, God talks about divorce – and there’s at least two things He says about divorce in this passage:

- firstly, that He hates divorce;<sup>11</sup>
- and secondly, that He is seeking a godly offspring!

You ask, “But what does divorce have to do with a godly offspring?”

Well, let’s say it this way: Divorce will make *raising a godly offspring* extra challenging!

You see, this is what God says in Mal 2:15, “**Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.**”<sup>12</sup>

My brother & sister (Young people [for you are next to get married if God wills]), think about it this way: There are many reasons as to why you & I should guard our marriages (should stay faithful in marriage; and not divorce). But have you ever grasped that a reason, high on the list as to why we should never divorce, is because of the need to produce godly families!?

Well, we have had three purposes for marriage. Here’s now a fourth one: sexual purity! You see, we live at a time when every kind of sexual sin abounds! And, as far as that is concerned, the world is in a moral morass!

Thankfully, some have the gift of purity! But most people do not have that gift! It is for that reason that they should make it their ambition to marry. Yes, it’s for them (the vast majority of people) that the Apostle Paul says (in 1 Cor 7:2), “...**since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.**”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ge 1:28). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> Van Dixhoorn (ibid:325)

<sup>11</sup> Mal 2:16 “**For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously”** (NASB).

<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mal 2:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>13</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Co 7:2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And, several verses further down (v.9), Paul says again, “***But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.***”<sup>14</sup>

Well, so far re Point 2 “The Purpose of Marriage.”

Here’s point 3...

### **Whom to Marry**

Here’s the reality: Generally speaking, any single adult can get married!

And in 1 Tim 4:3 the Apostle Paul spoke against false teachers who forbid people to marry! You see, already in the days of the Apostle Paul, some sects argued that, if you want to live a pure life – a life by which you elevate yourself to live closer to God – then you have to shun every kind of pleasure, comfort and earthly joy; yes, even marriage!

Well, it is out of such false theology that the whole system of celibacy (singleness) came about, which we see in many religious groups, also in Roman Catholicism with their unmarried monks and unmarried nuns – a way of life which is so unnatural and against how God has designed men and women.

So, it’s wrong to make a rule that forbids people to get married!

And so, people *should* get married, but they should choose the most committed and most faithful form of marriage!

And what is that?

Well, it’s what the Bible teaches: one man married for life to one woman – she willingly submitting to him, and he loving her self-sacrificially as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her!<sup>15</sup>

And so, because Christians have the best word on marriage – the Word of God – they should be marriage maximalists, and not marriage minimalists, as sadly is the trend in modern Western society!

Whom should one choose to get married to?

Well, throughout the ages, there has been many a culture that has practised arranged marriages – where the judgement and consent of those to be married have been ignored. And we might think that God’s Old-Testament people practised arranged marriages without consent of the bride or groom. But, look, even Rebecca was given the choice to marry Isaac. And she bravely decided to do so!<sup>16</sup>

Also, from our New-Testament passage (1 Cor 7:36-38), it is hard to imagine that Paul is talking about an arranged marriage when he clearly mentions the young man’s feelings, thoughts and decision-making about his fiancée and their upcoming marriage.<sup>17</sup>

In our culture, here in New Zealand (and within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand), people are allowed to choose for themselves whom they want to marry. But, having *said*

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<sup>14</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (1 Co 7:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Eph 5:22-33

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gn 24:57-59 ***Then they said, “Let’s call the girl and ask her about it.”***<sup>58</sup> ***So they called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?”***

***“I will go,” she said.***

<sup>59</sup> ***So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men.***

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor 7:36-37 ***If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.***<sup>37</sup> ***But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.***

that, young people, you will do well to ask your parents' opinion on the young lady (or young man) whom you want to marry. After all, your parents love you heaps! And not just *that!* They also have way more life's experience than you! What's more, because they are more distanced from the love-is-blind factor, they can weigh things up more objectively. Well, when it comes to seeking a husband/wife for life, the Bible is very clear: Christians must make sure that they marry Christians!

Again, in our New-Testament passage (1 Cor 7:39), Paul says that a Christian is free to marry anyone, as long as he or she *belongs to the Lord!*<sup>18</sup>

And because there is such a great difference between the teaching & worship practices of Roman Catholicism and the Reformed faith, the Westminster Confession's article 24.3 says that, "...*those who profess the true reformed religion should not marry unbelievers, Roman Catholics, or other idolaters...*"<sup>19</sup>

After all, God's Word gives repeated warnings that marriage between His children and the children of idol-worshippers would lead to spiritual prostitution – i.e., that those who marry unbelievers could exchange God for false gods – and even the children who will be born out of such a marriage could grow up worshipping false gods!

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 is one such passage: "***Do not intermarry with them*** (pagans). ***Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.***"<sup>20</sup>

Sadly, King Solomon ignored this. So, we read (in 1 Ki 11:4), "***As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.***"<sup>21</sup>

Then, long after Solomon had died, God also gave other Bible verses that warn against marrying unbelievers!<sup>22</sup> Sadly, many churchgoers have ignored these! And the result was that their children grew up with little or no Bible teaching. Two generations later, you cannot tell the difference between their children and unbelievers!

But here's another warning...

Young people, you should also take heed, for it is sadly true that there are some young men/women who profess to be Christian – they might even be in the RCNZ – but their lifestyle leaves great question marks as to whether they really are committed followers of Christ!

So, be careful from the start!

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor 7:39, ***A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord*** (NIV84; emphasis mine).

<sup>19</sup> The Modern Version of the WCF 24.3

<sup>20</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Dt 7:3–4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>21</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (1 Ki 11:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>22</sup> Nehemiah says in Neh 13:25-27, ***I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. 27 Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"***

Also cf. Mal 2:11-12, ***Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. 12 As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty.***

The Apostle Paul had in mind two plough oxen – the one big & strong, and the other one small, weak & lazy! So, what would happen if a farmer were to put these two animals together under one yoke? Well, life would be hard for the big ox! Besides, the ploughing job will not get done well!

The same will happen in a marriage between someone who loves Christ, and someone who does not! It will be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to train children from such a marriage in the Lord!

That’s why Paul says (in 2 Cor 6:14), “***Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?***”<sup>23</sup>

Young people, what will be a great help in choosing the right marriage partner?

This: It begins with your own heart! If you have put Christ first in your life, then you will find guidance in your relationships and engagements; and you’ll have God’s Word, a model for marriage!

AMEN (2,717 words excluding footnotes)

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<sup>23</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Co 6:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.