

The Extent of Marriage

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The extent and value of marriage as to why it is good and who can lawfully marry
2. aim – To cause us to see the value in marriage and to know how it extends over the whole world
3. passage – 1 Corinthians 7

b. outline

1. The Extent of Marriage
2. The Value of Marriage

c. overview

1. **before**, a *definition* of marriage (as its **theological purpose**)
 - a. **a foundational institution established by God at the outset of human history – his theological purpose as the very foundation of civilization itself**
 1. a **creative act** – as the *formation* of a new “creature” in the image of God himself
 2. a **creation ordinance** – as the *foundation* of human life (including procreation and family)
 3. a **covenant relationship** – as a *bond* which parallels God’s relationship with his chosen people
2. **now (first)**, the *extent* of marriage (framed by its **theological purpose**)
3. **now (secondly)**, a *brief discussion* of the value of marriage (**i.e.** to *complete* the thought ...)

I. The Extent of Marriage

Content

a. the question of the extent of marriage

“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 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.”

1. **question:** who **should** be married within the scope of God’s *purpose* for marriage?
 - a. **i.e.** *extending* out from and *assuming* the *original* example of **Genesis 2** (as a *template*)
 - b. **note:** *boundary* (**i.e.** who *cannot* be legitimately married) will be the topic of **sermon #3**
- b. **at this point:** the answer *must* include differentiating between *secular* and *Christian* marriage

b. the extent of marriage in the secular realm

1. because marriage is a *creation ordinance*, not a *Christian ordinance*:

“it is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent”

 - a. there are some *assumptions* here, given the *societal* and *cultural* world of the Confessors
 1. from paragraph 1: between a man and a woman, and monogamous (not polygamous)
 2. from paragraph 4: between *non-related* men and women (not incestuous)
 3. *modern* issues were simply beyond the “scope” of the Confession (**see sermon #3**)
 4. however ... it is *likely* that the Confessors *were* addressing here the Catholic understanding of sacerdotal celibacy (**i.e.** unmarried priests) – **i.e.** the Reformers were virtually *unanimous* in arguing *against* celibate priests (**see reason below**)
2. the Confession simply *grants* that non-Christian marriage is a lawful reality (under God)

c. the extent of marriage in the Christian realm (**1 Corinthians 7**)

1. the *context* of the chapter
 - a. the entire letter is written *to believers*, to a church with a number of problems and questions
 - b. in **chap. 1-6**, Paul addressed a number of issues brought to him by “*Chloe’s people*” (**1:10-11**)
 - c. in **chap. 7**, he begins addressing a number of issues sent to him *in writing*
 - d. the first of these *appears* to be the belief amongst the Corinthian Christians that “sex is bad”
 1. phrased as the maxim “*it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*” (**v. 1**)
 2. probably a **legalistic** response to the overwhelming sexual sin rampant in Corinth
 - a. **i.e.** if something is being *used* sinfully, then Christians must *avoid* it entirely ... right???
 - e. Paul connects the question *to marriage* – because sex is a function *only* of marriage (biblically)
 1. the command against adultery prohibits sex *with anyone other than a spouse*
 - a. fornication (*porneia*) = sexual immorality; sexual sin; sex without being married
 2. **i.e.** sexual intimacy in marriage is a *physical reflection* of the *metaphysical* “one-flesh” union
 - f. so ... Paul expounds several principles relating to the issue of marriage and celibacy

2. the **Five Principles** of the chapter (using a **brief exegesis**)
 - a. **#1:** Christians choosing a *celibate* lifestyle (in singleness) can have an *advantage* over the married
 1. this is the *primary* principle of the chapter: marry if you *have to*, but singleness is good
 - a. Paul speaks of himself as single (**v. 7**), and sees it as a *better thing* than marriage (**v. 38**)
 2. **i.e.** singleness affords the opportunity to *focus* on the work of the Lord (**vv. 32-35**)
 - a. married people have *divided* interests – how to please *both* the Lord and their spouse
 - b. single people *can have* a single interest – how to please the Lord with *all* their life
 - b. **#2:** Christians should marry if they are *unable* to choose a celibate lifestyle (**vv. 8-9**)
 1. **fact:** people are given *varying* levels of sex drive – those with greater sexual needs should seek marriage in order to avoid falling into sexual sin *outside of marriage*
 2. **as above:** this is *why* the Reformers *discarded* ministerial celibacy over against Rome ...
 - c. **#3:** Christians *must only* marry those who are believers and are *similarly orthodox* (see **Para. 3**)
 1. Paul largely *assumes* this, but gives “hints” of it throughout the chapter (and beyond)
 - a. in **v. 39**, Paul allows widows to remarry, but only “*in the Lord*”
 - b. in **vv. 12-16**, Paul specifically speaks of “mixed” marriages, in distinction to **vv. 10-11**
 - c. in **v. 16**, Paul recognizes that conversion is not *guaranteed* in marrying an unbeliever
 1. **i.e.** if *only* God can change a heart, what makes you think you can convert your fiancé?
 - d. in **2 Cor. 6:14**, Paul commands believers not to be “*unequally yoked*” to unbelievers
 2. **why:** because, although the *unbelieving* spouse puts nothing at risk in such a marriage, the *believing* spouse puts his or her *faith and obedience* at risk (**i.e. entropy**)
 - a. **e.g.** a Baptist marrying a Catholic – which “faith” is likely to dominate the relationship?
 - d. **#4:** Christians *must not* divorce a believing spouse or (then) must remain *unmarried* (**vv. 10-11**)
 1. Paul quotes these words *directly* from the lips of Christ (“*not I, but the Lord*”; **Luke 16:18**)
“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”
 2. **why:** because the “*one-flesh*” union is a work of God, not men (**Mark 10:2-9**)
“And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and 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.”
 - e. **#5:** Christians *may be separated* from an *unbelieving* spouse *without fear of adultery* (**vv. 12-16**)
 1. Paul *adds* this (“*I, not the Lord*”) as a *logical answer* to the “next question” (but still inspired)
 - a. yet ... all of the other principles can be *traced* to Christ’s teachings
 2. given that it would be possible for *one* of the partners to be saved *after* being married
 - a. *if* the unbelieving spouse *wants to stay*, then the believer should not leave them (**vv. 12f**)
 1. Paul argues that there is a certain “sanctifying” value for the unbeliever and his children
 2. the presence of genuine faith does not “save” them, but it does provide *opportunity*
 - b. *if* the unbelieving spouse *wants out*, then the believer is “*not enslaved*” (**v. 15**)
 1. some translate this to mean “free of the individual,” but not free to marry again (**v. 39**)
 2. some translate this to mean “able to obtain a legal divorce” (**i.e.** without fear of adultery)
 3. **likely:** a life of “*peace*” implies not having to worry about reconciliation and being free to enjoy the benefits of marriage again (otherwise, why bring it up?)
 - c. in either case, the *believing* spouse is given the responsibility to remain faithful to the marriage vows, something which would be *consistent* with a covenant view in Christ
 3. **principle: marriage, as a choice for the believer, is to be understood as a profound institution, not to be entered into lightly, but to be recognized as part of the ultimate good of the Creator**
 - a. **profound:** making the choice of partner one of *diligence* ...
 1. **LOW:** it’s better *not to marry* than to marry “poorly”, *especially* as a believer ... however ...
 2. **in reality:** there is no “perfect” partner, and establishing a set of standards “too high” *may* leave you single when it is “unnecessary” (**food for thought**)
 4. **extent of marriage: marriage is designed by God for all of society** (**i.e.** both inside and outside of the church) – marriage is something *most adults should pursue*, since it is the very foundation of human flourishing – marriage is a good thing, and **it has great value especially for believers ...**

II. The Value of Marriage

Content

a. the **biblical value of marriage** (**Ephesians 5:22-33**)

1. **continuing:** the need to *separate* Christian marriage from secular marriage
 - a. the letter to the **Ephesians** is *clearly* written to believers – Paul’s comments re: marriage apply *primarily* to Christians (although there is *some* overlap, **i.e.** the *natural* order of men and women)

- b. **principle: like all other things in the created order, marriage is also redeemed by Christ, so Christian marriage has higher standards and purposes than secular ones**
 - 1. thus, Paul can speak *differently* to Christian marriages than to secular ones
- 2. **familiar purpose of this text:** standards established for how husbands and wives are to *relate*
 - a. wives are to be *submissive*, and husbands are to *love self-sacrificially*
 - b. the passage is *often* treated as a treatise on *how marriages can work well* (and rightly so!!)
- 3. **greater purpose of this text:** marriage as an *example* of Christ's relationship with his church
 - a. Paul *compares* the husband-wife relationship to the Christ-church relationship
 - 1. marriage is an *example* of the relationship of Christ and his church
 - a. note the word "as" in **vv. 22, 23, 25, 28, 29** – a *comparison* and a *result*
 - b. note the word "body" in **vv. 23, 28, 29, 30** – a *one-flesh* relationship with his own
 - 2. built on the idea of an **arranged marriage** – the Father seeking a bride for his Son (**Rev. 19:7**)
 - b. **thesis: the self-sacrificial love of Christ has created an intimate, one-flesh relationship between himself and the church, which is pictured in marriage**
 - 1. **IOW:** the *New Testament* purpose of marriage is to picture the intimate relationship between Christ and his church – thus *Christian* marriage is *much more* than need-fulfillment – it is a love relationship built on *mutual* self-sacrifice and *radical* other-centeredness
- 4. **although marriage is a universal institution (for both believers and unbelievers), for those redeemed and included in the body of Christ (his church) marriage is a sacred and honorable way by which Christ expands his kingdom – redeeming sexuality and parenthood as a part of his larger plan to draw a "peculiar" people to himself**
 - a. marrying and having children is an *honorable* and *valuable* choice in life, one that God has established at the very *core* of civilization itself
 - 1. and, the coming of Christ is for the *redemption* of marriage itself (like all other things)
 - b. marrying and having children is a way by which the kingdom of God is *extended*, with faith moving from generation to generation
 - 1. **i.e.** the generational nature of the OT (**Deut. 29:29**) now reflected in the Christian faith passing from generation to generation *in the church*