

# **CBC Teaching Series – Tough Topics**

## **Marriage and Sexuality**

**Sunday, 2 April 2017**

### **I. A Biblical Theology of Marriage (and Sex)**

#### **A. Genesis 1:26-28**

1. The first command of God to humanity is to be fruitful and multiply. In other words, the first command of God is to marry, have sex, and have kids.
2. So, never let it be said that God is against sex, or that Christians are against sex. It was God's idea. He created us to enjoy it, possibly so that we might have some small glimpse of His joy in creation.

#### **B. Genesis 2:18-25**

1. Humans were not created to be solitary. God's immediate solution to human isolation is marriage, the physical/spiritual union of a man and a woman.
2. A man leaves the bond/allegiance he has with his parents, and clings/holds fast to his wife. This is the language of commitment and covenant.
3. Marriage is not an invention of humanity, but the plan and design of God for humanity. Therefore, we do not own marriage, or have the freedom to define it as we like. It is granted to us by God, and is His institution.
4. This one-flesh union of Adam and Eve is the first human institution. Marriage originated in the very first humans, before various eras, cultures, or other institutions. Therefore, the God-given gift of marriage is a transcultural reality, and its importance and necessity is not limited to any one people, time, or place. Marriage is fundamental in every culture.
5. As the first human institution, marriage is also the fundamental human institution. If the basic human structure of marriage fails, societies fail.

#### **B. Genesis 3**

1. The greatest threat to marriage is sin. As soon as sin enters the picture, the shameless and peaceful one-flesh union is disrupted. Blame, disunity, and shame enter into marriage as soon as humanity rebels against God.
2. Therefore, the solution to the fundamental brokenness in our marriages is only found in something that can address our problem of sin, which puts us at war with each other and in rebellion toward God.

#### **C. Reasons and Occasions for Marriage in the Old Testament**

1. Procreation – Genesis 1:26-28
2. Protection and Redemption of a Widow/Levirate Marriage and Perpetuity of Family Lineage – Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Ruth
3. Ongoing Health (Particularly Financial) of the Community or Tribe – Numbers 36
4. Marrying a Captive – Deuteronomy 21:10-14
5. Protection of a Woman's Dignity – Deuteronomy 22:28-29
6. Romantic Love – Song of Solomon

7. If You're a King, Alliances to Foreign Nations – 1 Kings 11:1-8  
-However, there are some fairly strong biblical warnings about this practice (Deuteronomy 17:17). It tends to go bad.

#### **D. Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-40**

1. Sadducees here propose a question to Jesus about levirate marriage, and whose wife the resurrected woman will be in the afterlife. Jesus challenges their assumptions, stating that in the resurrection there will be no human marriage. The institution of marriage is for this life only.
2. Thus, it does not appear there will be any marriage, sexual activity, or procreation in heaven. In that regard, we will be like angels, who do not marry or reproduce.
3. This does not necessarily mean that we will be genderless. Jesus is still a man in his post-resurrection body.
4. This tells us that marriage, though foundational to humanity, is not essential to the human. We do not have to be married or sexually active to be whole and human. Greater satisfaction, fullness, and essential humanity are found in the presence of Jesus Christ.
5. This also implies that the glory, bliss, and intimacy in the afterlife, both with God and with each other, will be greater than the sweetest intimacy we experience in marriage. Marriage is just a shadow pointing to that greater reality.

#### **E. Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12**

1. Here Jesus teaches that we do not have the freedom to divorce simply for any reason. Rather, God joins people together in marriage, and man should not separate what God has joined together.
2. Jesus teaches us here that marriage is not simply a formal agreement between two parties. When a man and woman are married, they are joined together by God. Marriage is a sacred act, in which God is involved.
3. See below for more thoughts on Jesus' teaching here regarding divorce.

#### **F. Luke 14:20-24**

1. Marriage is not seen as a valid excuse for not responding to the call of Christ.
2. The call of Christ takes priority over the call of marriage. The Gospel is more important.

#### **G. Romans 7:2-3**

1. Marriage is binding for life.
2. Marriage is not bound eternally. If one spouse dies, the other is free to remarry.

#### **H. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

1. Here Paul tells us that sex is not just a physical act. Our bodies and spirits are involved.
2. This is partially why it is only to be enjoyed in the context of marriage, where there is security, commitment, covenant faithfulness, and intimacy. Marriage is the only relationship intimate enough to rightly facilitate the intimacy of sex.

#### **I. 1 Corinthians 7**

1. Paul clearly says it is a good thing to remain single. Single people can devote their lives more fully to Gospel ministry. Therefore, Paul actually wishes more people had the gift of

- celibacy, to render greater service to the Lord. Knowing this, we must never assert that marriage is a superior state to singleness. Scripture never asserts this.
2. Part of the purpose for marriage is to facilitate our sexual drive. So, in some sense marriage is for sex. "It is better to marry than to burn with passion."
  3. Conversely, sex is reserved exclusively for marriage. Just as part of the purpose for marriage is sex, part of the very purpose for sex is the intimacy of marriage. Scripture speaks from the basic understanding that sexual activity outside of marriage is patently sinful. So the purpose of sex is marriage, and one of the purposes for marriage is sex. They are tied together and serve each other.
  4. Married partners are not to deprive each other of sexual activity, but are to give themselves to each other in sexual intimacy. Paul actually commands married people not to abstain from sex for a long period of time.
  5. Satan uses sexual immorality as a snare, so married people are to protect their marriage through frequent sex.
  6. In verses 25-35, Paul urges people not to pursue marriage too wholeheartedly. Rather, considering the immediacy of the last days in which we live, and the imminence of the Lord's return, we should not too strongly seek out any of this world's entanglements, even marriage. Our priority ought to be focused on serving the Lord.
  7. Paul does not condemn marriage, certainly. But he also doesn't speak about marriage with the same urgent necessity that so commonly characterizes modern Christians.

#### **J. Matthew 24:37-40**

1. "Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" is Christ's description of people who are wrapped up in the normal affairs of life, unconcerned about the coming judgment. Jesus uses the unflinching pursuit of marriage and the normal affairs of life as a descriptor/metaphor of not being concerned about the more important, spiritual things.
2. This paints marriage in the proper light as important and a basic act of humanity, but also as a lesser pursuit than the pursuit of a life of devotion to Christ.
3. You don't have to be particularly spiritual to be married.

#### **K. 1 Timothy 4:3**

1. At the same time, Paul condemns those who forbid marriage out of a sense of asceticism. Marriage is a gift of God to be enjoyed.
2. So, while Paul and Jesus don't require marriage, and see it as less important than devotion to God, they neither condemn marriage. They see it as God's gift to humanity.

#### **L. Ephesians 5:22-33**

1. Marriage is ultimately about the Gospel. This is the great mystery about marriage revealed in the Gospel. The ultimate purpose and reason for marriage is the Gospel. It's not finally about us, but God.
2. Husbands are to reflect the sacrificial love of Christ for the church.
3. Wives are to reflect the humble submission of the church to Christ.
4. Paul tells us in verse 32 that the mystery of marriage is designed to reveal the reality of Christ and the church. Marriage is God's great illustration of His love for His covenant bride.
5. So, marriage is just a passing shadow. The union of Christ and His Bride is the greater reality.

6. This puts marriage in the proper perspective. It is not supreme, or an idol, but simply points to that which is truly supreme. At the same time, it has incredible dignity, value, and sanctity, because it is God's chief designated means for illustrating the Gospel. We dare not mess with God's chosen metaphor for Christ and the church.
7. Also, all marriages are only ultimately healthy to the extent that they are a reflection of the Gospel, for that is God's intent for marriage.
8. If you want a healthy marriage, make sure your marriage is not about your marriage. That is a surefire way to destroy your marriage under the weight of selfishness and idolatry. If you want a healthy marriage, make it about the Gospel. Only then will you find your marriage in step with God's purpose.

### **M. Revelation 19:6-10, 21:2-3**

1. The full beauty of God's institution of marriage is revealed in Revelation 19. Here at the marriage supper of the Lamb, God is finally united to a faithful, spotless bride through the marriage of the Son and the Church.
2. This is the ultimate picture and fulfillment of covenant faithfulness. Israel broke the covenant, but now through the church God is perfectly married again to His people. By God's grace, His covenant community, the New Jerusalem, has become the spotless bride. Finally.

“Marriage answers to God's creation pattern for personal sexual relationship. A marriage is intended to be a relationship, healing and growing and maturing through time, a “harvest of the Spirit,” which is patterned on and in turn displays something of God's covenant relationship. It thus requires predictability, continuity, reliability—that is, permanence. God's creation ideal, Jesus affirms, is for a lifelong, exclusive union that should not be broken.” D. J. Atkinson

“Marriage is sacred not because we bestow that status upon it but because God does. Marriage therefore is as resilient as our sense of God.” Ray Ortlund, Jr.

## **II. The Bible and Divorce and Remarriage**

### **A. Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

1. God's OT Law allows for divorce, if the husband finds an indecency in the woman. We are not told explicitly what this indecency might be. However, Jesus gives us a hint in Matthew 19, and the language suggests some type of sexual immorality or impropriety. The word for “indecency” is literally “the nakedness of a thing.”
2. That man may never remarry that woman if she marries someone else, and becomes single again after (the text does not say that her remarriage is valid, it is simply proposing a hypothetical), for he has already shamed her. His decision must be final. It is possible that this ruling is to prevent wives from being passed around or lent out and returned. It drives commitment and finality on the part of men, and is probably a protection for women.
3. Note that a bill of divorce is given. There is to be a formality and covenantal understanding of marriage and divorce.

## **B. Exodus 21:10-11**

1. Here the context is a slave woman marrying her master. If the man takes on another wife, and neglects his first wife by not providing for her in the forms of food, clothing, or marital rights, then the first, slave wife is free to go.
2. Thus, it seems Moses lays out some basic provisions required in marriage by the husband: food, material necessities, and conjugal rights.
3. If these conditions of the covenant of marriage are not met, the woman is free to “leave” the man. So, we have three additional grounds for divorce in the OT (in addition to the indecency mentioned in Deuteronomy 24): neglect of food/sustenance, neglect of material necessities, and neglect of sexual intimacy. This may inform how we view Paul’s concept of “separation/leaving” in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

## **C. Divorce Is Sometimes Mentioned without Condemnation**

1. Leviticus 22:13
2. Numbers 30:9

## **D. The OT Has an Overall Negative View of Divorce, and God Hates Unfaithfulness**

1. Leviticus 21:7,14
2. Deuteronomy 22:19,29
3. Malachi 2:10-16 – Here the Lord is especially strong, stating that He hates the unfaithfulness of Judah. Their divorces are indicative of their covenant unfaithfulness to God. The one who divorces his wife shows hatred to the very one he should be protecting in marriage.

## **E. Matthew 5:31-32**

1. Jesus heightens our sensitivity to divorce.
2. Any man who divorces his wife scandalizes and wrongs her, causing her to be a covenant breaker, or “adulterer.” And any man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This is written from the point of view of the man, and places the responsibility/blame upon him.
3. The assumption here is that the divorces in question are wrongful/illegitimate divorces.
4. The exception that Jesus provides, which seems to be consistent with Deuteronomy 24, is the exception of sexual immorality. Divorce and remarriage are not sins when the reason for divorce is adultery, which is a violation of the covenant of marriage.
5. It is also safe to assume this is not the only possible exception, giving legitimate grounds of divorce. Paul will mention additional grounds for divorce in 1 Corinthians 7. Jesus’ intent here is not to list the only possible grounds for divorce. Rather, he is establishing a faithful, God-honoring interpretation of Deuteronomy 24, and specifically speaking to that context. Jesus was asked if a divorce for “any cause” is valid, and his answer is no, while listing one exception implied or stated in Deuteronomy 24.
6. Key Question: How do we define sexual immorality here? The term is porneia, a broad term for sexual sin of all kinds.
7. Note that here divorce in the case of adultery is never commanded, though it is allowed, by Jesus. Knowing God’s heart for His unfaithful bride (see Hosea, Ezekiel 16), and the biblical theology of God’s grace, it seems optimal in most cases, as Christ-followers, to seek reconciliation if possible. Though Jesus does not mandate that for us.

## **F. Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12**

1. Jesus states the biblical expectation that those who are married are never separated. This expectation is grounded in creation, and the one-flesh union.
2. Some Jewish interpreters had applied the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to mean that a man could divorce a woman for ‘any cause,’ even spoiling a dish. For some scholars of the day, all that was required for divorce was that the man find the woman displeasing to him.
3. When questioned about the Law allowing divorce, Jesus informs us that the Mosaic Law was a temporarily binding institution for a specific context. In that context, given the sinfulness of men, Moses allowed divorce. But the transcultural, eternal norm—dating back to creation—is that man and woman are bound together for life.
4. Jesus here both rightly interprets Deuteronomy 24, and grounds his teaching about marriage and divorce in the transcultural creation account
5. Jesus is so strict about marriage, that the disciples wonder if marriage is even worth the effort! Jesus’ teaching regarding the narrow options for divorce seems to shock people.
6. Jesus does not soften his message for his disciples. He does insist that few can receive this teaching. And not marrying is a valid option. He then explains that some are indeed eunuchs (i.e. celibate) for the sake of God’s kingdom. This is a theme Paul will pick up in 1 Corinthians 7.

## **G. 1 Corinthians 7:10-16**

1. Paul clearly rejects divorce. If anyone does divorce someone (the assumption is it is a groundless divorce), they are not free to remarry anyone else. If they do, it is seen as a transgression by Paul.
2. The spouse being an unbeliever is not valid grounds for divorce. This is actually somewhat shocking. Different ideologies, different worldviews, and different faiths even are not biblical grounds for divorce.
3. If the unbelieving spouse deserts the believing partner, then they are free to go and the believer is not bound. The believer who has been left is free to remarry.
4. It seems the only biblical ground for divorce is when the other person has broken the covenant of marriage, through adultery or separation.
5. Key Question: What does it mean to separate/leave (as in, “if the unbeliever leaves...”) ? What constitutes separation? Must there be official legal documents, or are there other forms of separation (such as abuse, neglect, or desertion), that constitute practical separation/desertion, thus leaving the believer free to remarry? How we answer this question will go a long way toward developing our understanding of divorce and remarriage.

## **H. Jeremiah 3:8 and Revelation 19**

1. After all of Israel’s unfaithfulness (see Ezekiel 16 and 23), God sent Israel away with “a decree of divorce.”
2. Thus, shockingly, God Himself is a divorcee. He knows what it feels like to have a spouse break the covenant of marriage. He knows what it’s like to have a marriage go bad due to spousal unfaithfulness.
3. Side note to this: God initiates the decree of divorce, but it is clearly Israel that is the covenant breaker. Therefore, we should be very, very hesitant to assume that the party who issues

- the “divorce papers” is the one at fault. The problem of divorce is not a matter of paper and pen, but of breaking the covenant of marriage, and that is where our concern must lie.
4. The Gospel picture is God reconciling back with His bride, through Jesus Christ. This reconciliation culminates in the wedding supper of the Lamb of Revelation 19.

### **I. The Gospel and Divorce**

1. The Gospel means that forgiveness and grace are available to us.
2. If we enter into a marriage sinfully, by the Gospel we can proceed in the marriage faithfully.
3. If we mistreat a spouse, we can be forgiven in the Gospel.
4. If a spouse mistreats us, we can forgive because we have been forgiven in the Gospel.
5. If we end a marriage sinfully, we can find forgiveness for our transgressions in the Gospel.
6. The Gospel compels us to treat sinners with grace. Jesus taught sternly about marriage, so much so that it shocked his disciples. He also spoke graciously to the woman caught in adultery, and intimately with the woman who had been married and divorced multiple times. While we hold to the sanctity of marriage, which we must, we must also unwaveringly hold to the grace of the Gospel.

### **III. The Danger of Sexual Immorality**

#### **A. Genesis 20:3-10**

1. Abimelech, who does not appear to be part of the believing community, recognizes the danger and sin of marital infidelity. He is appalled that Abraham would give him his wife.
2. Humans have an innate understanding that the covenant of marriage is not to be violated.

#### **B. Exodus 20:14,17, Leviticus 18, 20:10-21, Numbers 5:11-31, Deuteronomy 5:18, 22:13-30**

1. God’s Law for Israel shows penalties for sexual immorality and adultery (including incest, homosexuality, rape, bestiality, adultery, and false accusations of immorality). While we are not under the OT Law, and we are not called to administer the same punishments for immorality, we still see here that sexual immorality is a serious sin before God. It rejects His original design for creation: human thriving founded upon intimate, faithful, covenant commitments.
2. God tells His people that they are to remain a holy and pure people, so that they may remain in the land. God’s concern is that they be His holy people, distinct from the sinful surrounding nations. When God’s people reject God’s holy laws, it will not go well for them in the land. They will face the natural consequences of their rebellion. This is exactly what happens in Israel.
3. From these passages, and the whole of Scripture, God clearly shows that sexual immorality is sexual activity outside the covenant union of a man and a woman.

#### **C. Sexual Immorality Reflects the Covenant Unfaithfulness of Israel**

1. Deuteronomy 31:16
2. Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel 23
3. Isaiah 1:21, Jeremiah 2:20, Jeremiah 2:32, 3:1
4. Hosea 2, 5:3, 9:1, Malachi 2:10-16

#### **D. Sexual Immorality Is Generally Destructive**

1. Proverbs 5-7 – These chapters show us that sexual immorality destroys homes and relationships. It is a snare especially to young men.
2. Some use the example of prostitution, and wonder what the problem is with two adults consenting to have sex for pay. Something similar is said about pornography; that this is just a personal act that does not hurt anyone. Spend any time studying sex slavery, sex trafficking, and the abduction of minors and you will no longer believe that sexual immorality is innocent.

“The victims, whenever we sexually experiment as a society, are always women and children.”  
John Stonestreet

#### **E. Sexual Immorality Is Personally Destructive**

1. 1 Peter 2:11 – Immorality wages war against your soul.
2. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – Sexual immorality is a particularly destructive sin, because it corrupts us from within.
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 – God is an avenger toward those who are sexually immoral. Those who wrong their brother in sexual impurity anger God, and He will set Himself against them. God’s will for your life is sexual purity. God’s wrath is reserved for those who sin here.
4. It has been proven that pornography actually rewires our brain, and affects our brain biology and chemistry. It corrupts us spiritually, emotionally, morally, relationally, and physically. One of the great problems in young marriages today is men and women unable to be aroused by their partner, because they have been so deeply affected by pornography. We don’t hate pornography because we hate fun. We hate pornography because it destroys people and marriages, and brings dishonor to God and His design.

[https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/rewired-how-pornography-affects-the-human-brain#/  
http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-high-cost-of-free-porn](https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/rewired-how-pornography-affects-the-human-brain#/)

#### **F. Sexual Immorality Is Ecclesiastically Destructive**

1. 1 Corinthians 5 – Sexual immorality corrupts the whole church.
2. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – Are bodies are temples of God Himself. Should we then connect that temple to a prostitute, or corrupt the temple of God with sexual immorality?

#### **G. Sexual Immorality Will Be Judged by God**

1. Matthew 5:27-30 – Jesus clearly teaches here that those who are controlled by lust will be condemned in hell.
2. Hebrews 13:4 – God will judge those who defile the marriage bed. God’s speech is plain.
3. Ephesians 5:3-6 – Everyone who is sexually impure has no inheritance in God’s kingdom.
4. Galatians 5:19-21
5. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
6. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8
7. Revelation 21:8, 22:12-16 – The sexually immoral are left outside of the new heaven and earth. Those who are sexually immoral and unrepentant will not inherit the kingdom of God. Almost every list of sins in the NT includes sexual immorality. God takes it seriously.

8. Just about every single one of us has been sexually immoral in some way. We are all affected. The only hope for us is salvation from God, in Christ. By grace we are saved from our sin, saved from judgment, and saved to holy lives in sexual righteousness.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

#### **IV. Practical Questions**

**A. Can a Christian marry a non-Christian?**

**B. Should a pastor marry two non-Christians? Should a church host a marriage between two non-Christians?**

**C. Is marriage a church institution, or a state institution, or both? How does our answer affect the way we view civil marriages?**

**D. Should a Christian be married by both the church and the state?**

**E. What happens when the state’s definition of marriage differs from that of the church? Whose word is authoritative? Does the state have the right to come up with a different definition of marriage?**

**F. How should the church engage with those who are going through or recovering from a divorce?**

**G. What about cohabitation?**

**H. What about polygamy?**