

CHAPTER 25 – MARRIAGE

Marriage is Monogamous

1. *Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at one and the same time.*

(a) **Monogamy.** See Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5-6, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6, which teach that God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman. Consider Jesus' teaching that a divorced person (other than for immorality) who marries another is guilty of adultery (Mark 10:11-12); it must be the same for a person who marries another while still living with the first. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), and Christ only has *one* bride to whom He is totally committed!

(b) **Polygamy.** Polygamy is a perversion of marriage. How can two women and one man become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24)? The first recorded case of polygamy is by wicked, revengeful Lamech (Genesis 4:23). What about the polygamy of Jacob, David and Solomon? It is recorded as a fact, but nowhere does God say He approves it. In each case there are sinful results: the rivalry between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:31-30:24); the feuding between David's step-siblings (2 Samuel 13, 1 Kings 1); the wives of Solomon turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11:1-8).

(c) **Homosexuality.** Marriage is heterosexual, and not between two persons of the same sex. God created for Adam (a male), Eve (a female). The command for procreation makes it clear that marriage was ordained to be heterosexual (Genesis 1:28). Homosexuality is specifically condemned (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10; remember Sodom in Genesis 19:5, and Gibeah in Judges 19:22). Any sexual activity outside the monogamous, heterosexual relation is sin, including fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest.

Purposes of Marriage

2. *God instituted marriage for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind in accordance with His laws, and for the prevention of immorality.*

(a) **Companionship.** "For the mutual help of husband and wife". This is the basic reason for marriage. A marriage that is childless by God's providence is no less a marriage and so is no reason for divorce or taking another partner. God gave Adam Eve as "a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). Husband and wife are considered "companions" = close friends (Prov. 2:17, Malachi 2:14). The wife is not to be treated just as a 'child-bearer' or servant; she is equal to the man as made in the image of God.

(b) **Children.** "For the increase of mankind". Within the marriage union, as God enables, children are to be born (see Genesis 1:28). Having many children was one of the blessings of the old covenant (Deuteronomy 28:4,11, see Psalm 127:3-5, 128:3-4). Under the new covenant it must be the aim of each couple to have children; the attitude that views them as a curse or a burden is rooted in selfishness. Family planning is permissible for the sake of the health of the mother, or for inability to care for more children financially.

(c) **Chastity.** "For the prevention of immorality". Sexual desires are good (and not of the devil), but are only to be satisfied in the permanent marriage union. See 1 Corinthians 7:1-2,9. If young people have to delay marriage because of educational or economic considerations are they not being put under pressure to commit immorality?

Restrictions on Marriage

3. *It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, provided that they are able to give their rational consent.*

But it is the duty of Christians to marry only 'in the Lord'. In consequence, those who profess the Christian faith should not contract marriages with infidels or idolaters. It is also quite unfitting for godly persons to become partners in marriage with persons who lead wicked lives or who maintain damnable heresies.

4. *Marriage must not be contracted within the degrees of blood relationship or kinship forbidden in God's Word. Nor when such incestuous unions occur can they ever be made lawful, either by any law of man or by the consenting parties, and the persons concerned can never rightly live together as man and wife.*

(a) The **general rule** (section 3, lines 1-2). The general rule is liberty (compare 1 Timothy 4:3): older people may marry, handicapped people may marry, those from different racial backgrounds may marry, generally any man may marry any woman. But what is lawful may not be advisable (as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 7:25ff.). Rational consent must be given by both parties, i.e. no forced marriages. The implication is that those who cannot give such consent should not marry. Any marriage must be contracted according to the laws of the country, taking into account the lowest age permitted, and the need for parental consent.

(b) The **Christian** restriction. Christians may only marry "in the Lord" (section 3, lines 3-6). It is sinful for a Christian to marry anyone but another Christian (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 16:14). Christians who are single should not seek that serious companionship with unconverted members of the opposite sex that could lead to marriage; such relationships started have often resulted in Christians marrying non-Christians. Many passages deal with the problem of too close a relationship with non-Christians, such as Psalm 1:1, Proverbs 1:10, 2:20, 13:20, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 2 Timothy 2:22. Single Christians seeking a relationship that could lead to marriage must also first assess Biblically the profession of faith of the other person. The help and advice of parents, pastors and more mature Christians should be sought out.

(c) The **natural** restriction. "Incestuous unions" are not lawful (section 4). Leviticus 18:6-18 teaches that the nearest relative that can be married is a first cousin, i.e. a child of a brother/sister of one's parents. Marrying a nearer relative is called 'incest'. But churches have traditionally forbidden marriage to first cousins, nephews and nieces. The restriction also involves those not actually blood relatives, such as step-mother (Leviticus 18:8, 1 Corinthians 5:1) and brother's wife (Leviticus 18:16, Mark 6:17). These restrictions do not appear to have been removed under the new covenant, for incest is severely condemned (1 Corinthians 5:1), and such things were an abomination to God among the Canaanites as well (Leviticus 18:24-30).

Note on **Divorce**. Marriage is for life, until one partner dies (1 Corinthians 7:10-11,39). There are only 2 possible grounds for divorce, the cancellation of the marriage union:

1. Adultery (Matthew 5:32, 19:9)
2. Desertion by the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)