

# Relationships

KEY IDEAS:

**Commitment** - What does this mean? What does it involve? How might a (married) couple show commitment to each other?

**Responsibilities** - What are these? What responsibilities do people have towards others? What responsibilities would a (married) couple have towards each other?

**Conflict** - what does this mean? What are the causes of conflicts within (marriage) relationships?

**Reconciliation** - What does this mean? How might reconciliation be brought about within a (marriage) relationship? What happens if reconciliation cannot be reached?

**Love** - What are the different types of love? (Sexual, friendship, family, an unconditional love for your neighbour). In what ways might each of these be shown and how important is each to the relationships people have?

Storge = an affection for things and animals

Philia = love of friends and family; a stronger bond between people.

Eros = sexual love, physical love between two people.

Agape = unconditional love, given freely and unreservedly.

**Marriage** - What does this involve? What is/are the purposes of marriage? Why do people marry? What ceremony brings the marriage into existence? How does the ceremony show the purpose of marriage and the commitments being made? Why do marriages succeed and fail? Should only believers be permitted to marry in a religious place of worship? Should places of worship allow gay couples to have a full Christian marriage ceremony? Is a religious marriage ceremony the best way to start a marriage? Are mixed marriages a good thing? Is marriage necessary?

**Divorce** what does this involve? Why do divorces happen? Should divorce be allowed? Should a divorced person be allowed to remarry in a place of worship? How do religious believers respond to the issues of divorce and remarriage?

## **RELIGIOUS TRADITION – CHRISTIANITY**

Jesus said: "Have you not read that he [God] who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19: 4-6)

[This passage suggests that:](#)

[Marriage should be between one man and one woman \(monogamy\) that marriage and sex are gifts from God and are part of his purpose for men and women and that divorce is not acceptable since those whom God has joined cannot be separated except by death.](#)

St. Paul wrote: "If they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (1 Corinthians 7:9).

Paul is clearly indicating that sexual desire should be channelled into marriage.

Sexual intercourse is understood to have two main purposes - unitive and procreative. i. e. to unite (bring a couple closer together through an expression of love) and to produce children. Some Christians believe that these two purposes should never be separated. If they are, sex loses its purpose and, could be seen as unnatural. Since one of the purposes of sex is to produce children, and, it is believed that, the right environment for children is a loving committed relationship, then sex should be confined to marriage.

The traditional teaching of the Christianity is that generally sex should not take place outside of marriage. (This applies to both pre-marital and extra-marital sex). The Bible teaches that fornication (sex before marriage) is against God's will for his people. It is believed that sex is special and should be between just two people at anyone time within a committed and loving relationship. This is usually interpreted to mean only within marriage because in that situation a man and a woman have committed themselves to one another for life and have confirmed this by making vows.

Casual sex and promiscuity devalues both people and sex, therefore is unacceptable. It is also misusing a gift from God which was intended to unite a couple in love and to create children.

The True Love Waits Movement or Silver Ring Thing is a Christian movement which promotes chastity and saving sex until marriage.

It must be noted that some Christians have argued that as long as the couple are in a committed and loving relationship, then sex before marriage is not unacceptable. It is the quality of the relationship that is important not whether a marriage ceremony has been performed.

Adultery (a sexual relationship with someone other than the marriage partner) is seen to be unacceptable. It is against one of the Ten Commandment ("You shall not commit adultery") and breaks the promise of faithfulness made in the marriage service. It is also seen to be threatening to family life. .

Some Christians may choose to be celibate (not have sexual relationships). This may be because they want to be able to give more time and energy to serving God and doing God's work. Sexual relationships could distract from spiritual quest. Some may be priests/monks/nuns who dedicate themselves to God and their work for him and others. Some may have no interest in marriage or child-rearing.

### **WHAT IS MARRIAGE?**

Marriage is a **covenant** (an agreement) between a man and a woman (before God). Each agrees to belong to the other in a permanent, exclusive, sexual partnership of loving mutual care, concern and shared responsibility in the hope of having children and bringing up a family. *(Do all these elements have to be present for a "real" marriage to exist?)*

### **A Christian Marriage Service**

Is usually carried out in a religious building (e.g. church, chapel). The purposes of marriage are explained. Questions are asked as to whether either the couple or the congregation know of any reason why the marriage should not take place. (Is there any lawful impediment?)

Vows are taken, witnessed by the congregation. There is the exchange of rings as a symbol of the commitments being made. The couple are pronounced husband and wife.

There may also be a sermon on the theme of marriage. Bible readings, prayers and hymns will be included. The register will be signed and witnessed.

### **Purposes of Marriage:**

- ★ Marriage is given that a husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and joy ....
- ★ Marriage is given that with delight and tenderness they may know each other in love, and through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives....
- ★ Marriage is given that they might have children and be blessed in caring for them and bringing them up in accordance with God's will, to praise his glory.

NB. There is an emphasis that marriage is a gift.

The passage suggests that marriage is to bring up children in a stable, loving Christian family. For companionship/comfort and to help each other. To control/channel sexual desire and instinct. It is meant to be a lifelong relationship and for the procreation of children in a loving, mutually supportive relationship.

### **Marriage Vows:**

I take you to be my husband/wife, to have and to hold. from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part. According to God's holy law. And to this I pledge myself.

NB. These vows reflect responsibilities that the couple have towards each other. These vows should be kept in practical ways through all the experiences which the couple have. Notice the responsibilities exist until the death of one of the couple. The responsibilities include caring, supporting, being there for the other person whatever happens. Since the marriage relationship is meant to be exclusive, there is a responsibility to be faithful. The rings are exchanged as a symbol of the commitment being made and their never ending love.

### **CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON CONTRACEPTION**

NB. Christian views on this issue reflect beliefs about the purposes of marriage and sex.

Since having children is seen as a central part of Christian marriage and one of the purposes of sex, some Christians see artificial forms of contraception as being wrong. The official teaching of The Catholic Church is that artificial methods of contraception are against God's will. It separates out the unitive and procreative aspects of sex, goes against God's command to "fill the earth" and the belief that it is up to God to decide how many children a couple should have. Children are a gift. The Roman Catholic Church remains opposed to all forms of artificial contraception. Natural forms (e.g. 'rhythm method') are accepted.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*, declared two principles: (i) sexual intercourse should strengthen the bond between husband and wife, and (ii) sexual intercourse should always be open to the possibility of creating new life. These two should not be separated since the sexual act is believed to reflect the total self-giving of two people in love. There is also the belief that artificial contraception leads to casual sex and a lack of respect for other people.

Recently, however, in 2010, the Pope said that it might be justified for a male prostitute to use a condom in order to prevent the spread of HIV and Aids. A rather odd example I know!

**Most Protestant Churches** allow the use of artificial contraception, within marriage and if both partners agree. They believe that it will enable couples to choose when they want children, enabling them to care for them better and it prevents unwanted pregnancy. It allows a married couple to enjoy sexual relationships without the threat of pregnancy which in turn will allow a closer, more loving relationship. It also permits people to be good stewards since overpopulation can be avoided.

Some Christians, however, have expressed concern over certain types of contraception which they claim cause an early abortion. These are the morning after pill and The IUD. Please note that medical professionals generally deny this.

### **WHY DO MARRIAGES SUCCEED AND FAIL?**

**Succeed:** Compatibility; shared interests; realistic expectations; sexual satisfaction; children; friendship; love; shared religious belief; a willingness to persevere when problems arise; a willingness and determination to keep the marriage vows; the support of family, friends, religious community; willingness to forgive. Can you think of any others? Which do you think are the most important?

**Fail:** Financial difficulties; sexual problems; unreasonable behaviour; affairs or infidelity; interference from in-laws etc., alcohol/drug problems, pregnancy/children, lack of children/pregnancy, religious differences, work/career pressures, lack of communication, separation or little time together, unreasonable expectations, taking the partner for granted.

What can be done?

The couple might seek to talk to each other, be honest and recognise there is a problem discuss the problem, be willing to forgive. They may also seek outside help from family, friends, religious community or an organisation such as RELATE.

The religious community may be able to offer help in the following ways:

- ★ The religious leader in the community could offer advice.
- ★ Marriage counselling/therapy could be organised through the community.
- ★ Older or more experienced couples could talk with and support the couple in difficulties.
- ★ Family members might offer help and support.
- ★ Prayers could be offered for or with the couple, about the marriage and the problems they are facing.
- ★ A group for 'young marrieds' could be organised to enable discussion and sharing and mutual support.
- ★ A pre-marriage course could be organised for those about to marry in which expectations could be discussed, the religious teaching on marriage explained and advice on how to deal with difficulties.

## **CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO DIVORCE and RE-MARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE**

Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity (adultery), and marries another commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

Paul wrote: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) - and that the husband should not divorce his wife." (I Corinthians 7: 10 - 11)

There are different views within Christianity concerning divorce and remarriage in church: The Roman Catholic Church will not allow remarriage because **it does not accept divorce**. The marriage vows are made, before God, for life and therefore even a legal divorce is not recognised. No one can separate those who God has joined together. Marriage is a sacrament and cannot be broken. This means that there cannot be a remarriage because, in God's eyes and the Church's eyes, the first marriage still exists. A marriage may be **annulled** (that is it is said that the marriage never really took place in the first place). People should not be allowed to take promises that they had previously broken. It is also felt that if divorce and remarriage becomes too easy, then couples will not work at marriages and marriage will be devalued.

Many Protestant Churches will remarry people, particularly an "innocent" party in a marriage break-up. It is believed that to allow this is more compassionate. Individuals do make mistakes and it is more loving to give a second chance. So whilst accepting that the ideal is "lifelong marriage", human frailty and weakness must be taken into account. Sadly humans do make mistakes and The Bible teaches that God is forgiving! A minister cannot be forced to conduct a remarriage ceremony if it goes against his/her conscience.

## **RELIGIOUS TRADITION – ISLAM**

The Quran states: "And among His signs is this that He created for you partners from among yourselves, that you might live in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy in your hearts. Surely in this are signs for people who think." (Surah 30:21)

**All Muslims are expected to marry**. Marriage and sex reflect the will of Allah. Marriage is equally desirable for men and women.

Marriage is the acceptable context for sex. People need company. Marriage and a family provide that. Children take many years to become independent. A family gives a secure framework for them to grow up as part of the Muslim community. Family life teaches people the importance of being kind, affectionate and considerate towards others.

The Quran states: "If you fear that you cannot deal fairly with orphans, you may marry other women who seem good to you, two, three or four. But if you fear you cannot treat them all fairly, then marry only one or any slave girl you own. Then it will be less likely you will do an injustice." (Surah 4:3)

Muslim men are allowed to have up to four wives. Polygamy is to have more than one wife.

At the time of Muhammad, it was thought to be the duty of a man to look after as many women as possible. Marriage was the best way to ensure that a woman was secure and treated with respect.

Today some scholars say that when a woman is ill or cannot have children, a man can take another wife. Others say that it is entirely a matter of choice, and others still that polygamy is always wrong because it is impossible to treat more than one wife fairly. A wife may have it written into the marriage contract that she will be the only wife. *In Britain, when a husband takes more than one wife, the marriage is recognised by the Shari'ah (Islamic Law) but not under British law, where bigamy (more than one wife) is illegal.*

Islam teaches that sex is a natural part of human life.

- ★ The sex drive is natural and God-given. Sex is a gift from Allah.
- ★ Sex must be part of marriage. That way sex leads to peace and avoids extremes of behaviour.
- ★ Sex outside marriage is absolutely forbidden in the Quran. Since the sex drive is strong, all Muslims should marry if they can - there is no reward for celibacy.
- ★ They should marry and they should have sex: to produce children, for their physical satisfaction and to build a relationship of love and kindness between husband and wife.

Adultery is wrong. The Quran states: "Do not come near adultery; it is shameful and an evil way." (Surah 17:32).

Adultery would also be against the duties that a man has towards his wife and a wife's duties to her husband.

### **MUSLIM VIEWS ON CONTRACEPTION**

Islam has different views of the issue.

**Many agree** that contraception is allowed for married couples to enable them to plan their families and ensure the health of and well-being of all children and of the mother herself.

The use of contraception requires the wife's consent.

They would not allow a method of contraception that could cause the abortion of the fertilised egg. So they might have concerns against the morning after pill and the IUD.

The pill and condoms are generally considered to be acceptable forms of contraception as long as they are not used to enable a person to be promiscuous.

They might avoid sterilization for men and women as these are permanent. A vasectomy can be reversed in a man but is not always successful.

**Some Muslims do not agree** with contraception. They say that Allah has a plan for all human beings. So if Allah intends a child to be born then it will be born, and to try to interfere with Allah's plan is wrong. They also say that Allah gives people the resources and strength to cope with anything in life and that includes all children.

### **A MUSLIM MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

**NB. ARRANGED MARRIAGES:** According to the teachings of Islam, young men and women should not mix freely and so in most Muslim traditions the parents arrange whom their child should marry. This is known as arranged marriage. In all Muslim marriages, parents are expected to have a role in choosing their child's partner. However, as marriage is a contract between individuals, both partners must agree to the match. A marriage must not be arranged for anybody against their will.

- ★ Marriage is both a social/legal contract and a sacred one.
- ★ At least two adults should be present to witness the exchange of vows.
- ★ Both families sign the contract (nikah - this is agreed between the two families and witnessed by the bride's guardian and two other people).
- ★ The bride receives a marriage gift (mahr), property, jewellery, money, from the bridegroom.
- ★ Promises to base the marriage on the teachings of Allah are made and to make it a partnership of love, mercy, peace, faithfulness and co-operation.
- ★ Readings from the Quran are included and prayers offered. The place of marriage could be a mosque, a home or a large hall.

### A man's duties towards his wife

- ★ The groom to give a mahr (marriage gift) to the bride. This is a form of security stored in case of a future emergency. It is the wife's property and the husband can never claim it back
- ★ A man must provide for the financial needs of his family. Men are seen as the 'protectors and maintainers' of women
- ★ A man must treat his wife (wives) fairly and equally.
- ★ A man must not be involved in sex outside marriage.

### A woman's duties towards her husband

- ★ A woman must protect her husband's property in his absence.
- ★ She must be faithful to him.
- ★ She must dress modestly and cover herself in of the presence of people outside the family or when she goes out of the home.
- ★ She must ensure that the home is well managed and that the children are brought up well, even if she works.
- ★ She must obey her husband as long as he does not ask her to break the laws of Allah.

### MUSLIM ATTITUDES TO DIVORCE

The basic principle for Muslims is that marriage should last until the death of one of the partners. Muslims value family life very highly.

One important element in the divorce proceedings is that the marriage should be saved if possible. ["If you fear a breach between a man and his wife, appoint two arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers. If both want to brought back together, Allah will settle things between them." (Surah 4:35)]

**Divorce:** A husband says "I divorce you" to his wife.

- ★ Then there is an IDDAH period, usually of three months, which is designed to allow time for reflection and reconciliation. This also ensures that the wife is not divorced when pregnant. If she is pregnant the iddah lasts until the woman has recovered from the birth.
- ★ If there is no reconciliation during the iddah period the couple are divorced. Sexual relations during the iddah count as reconciliation.
- ★ If there is reconciliation the couple are still married. If at any time during the marriage, the husband again divorces his wife, they go through the same process.
- ★ A third pronouncement of divorce is effective immediately.



- ★ However, the iddah period applies before the wife can marry someone else. They cannot marry each other at any time in the future unless she has been married to someone else in the meantime.

In Islam, when a man who divorces his wife, he ought to guarantee her rights and dignity. He must return any dowry and make sure her financial obligations are met. The honour of both parties must be maintained and good relationships kept with the children. The father is responsible for any children.

Divorce by talaq is the right of the husband although a woman can ask for the right to divorce in this way by having it written into her marriage contract at the time it is agreed. Otherwise a woman who wants a divorce can ask for divorce by "khul" which means she can have her case presented to a Shari'ah court.

A woman can seek divorce in circumstances such as adultery, desertion, lack of companionship or marital relations over four months without any good cause, lack of maintenance by her husband, harm by her husband, insults to herself or her family, breaking any part of the marriage contract. If a woman asks for a divorce and the man is innocent of any fault, she has to agree to give back the marriage gift if the husband asks for it.

However, if the man has not behaved well towards his wife, the judge may decide that the man is not entitled to anything.

## **SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS AND SAME –SEX MARRIAGES**

### **Should same sex marriages be allowed in places of worship?**

- A civil partnership is a legal union between couples that are gay or lesbian. They were introduced to give these couples the same financial rights as married couples. Once a civil partnership occurs between these couples, they are entitled to receive similar treatment and benefits as that of any married couple. On December 5, 2005, The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into effect in the UK, allowing couples of the same sex to have legal recognition of their relationship. Any couples who enter into a civil partnership obtain the new legal status of "Civil Partners", instead of the traditional husband and wife status. It gives them exactly the same legal and financial rights as heterosexual married couples.
- **Under David Cameron's government, gay marriage is now legal. Gay couples wanted the right to use the term marriage just like other couples. The government says that it will not force religions to conduct gay marriages in their places of worship but they can do so if they wish.**
- **The Church of England and The Catholic Church have said they will not conduct gay marriage ceremonies in their churches. Evangelical churches also have spoken out strongly against gay marriage as they believe a marriage is between a man and a woman.**
- Evangelical Christians generally believe that practising homosexual relationships are sinful and go against God's plan. After all, they argue that a gay couple cannot naturally reproduce and having children is an important purpose of Christian marriage. They point out that The Bible states that homosexuality is a sin. They would strongly oppose the idea of gay people being allowed Christian marriages in



- church and usually oppose the idea of civil partnerships. Adam and Eve were seen as the model for a marriage relationship in The Bible.
- British Muslim groups have also said they are strongly opposed to same sex unions of any kind in their places of worship.
  - **Some Christians do support gay rights. There is even a gay and lesbian Christian movement. Some Christians argue that homosexuality is part of their design and that God has made them this way. Everyone is made in God's image and God would accept them for who they are. God would be pleased that they are in a long term committed relationship. If a Christian was gay they might really want to seal their union in front of God. They might see some of The Bible's teachings about homosexuality as outdated and argue that The Church should move with the times.**
  - Quakers believe that there is something of God in everybody and that each human being is of unique worth. This is why Quakers value all people equally, and oppose anything that may harm or threaten them. They would argue that committed gay relationships should be celebrated and blessed by God. Quaker Christians actually put pressure on the government to change the law. They are very glad at the change in the law and will hold ceremonies for committed gay couples in their meeting houses.

DON'T FORGET TO CONSIDER WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THIS ISSUE AND WHY.

### **KEY WORDS and definitions.**

These will always be the 2 mark questions.

Commitment = making and keeping a promise, such as wedding vows.

Chastity = decision not to have sex before marriage, for example, because it is believed that sex is sacred.

Conflict = working against each other rather than in unity. Conflict in marriage can lead to divorce.

Love = to have a deep affection and express it through words and actions.

Reconciliation = apologise or say sorry, and to become friends again. Many faith communities have reconciliation services.

Responsibilities = duties you should carry out, such as looking after family members.