

Polygamy – God’s Will or the Will of Men?

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“Polygamy is the system of having more than one wife at a time” (The Oxford New Expanded Dictionary, Third Edition, published 1988).

In some religious structures it is believed that this is an acceptable Biblical practice, and should be a right that is protected under various civil laws in countries that uphold freedom of religion. In this study, God’s word will be examined to see whether it is His will that an individual have more than one spouse at a time.

In the second chapter of Genesis, God created a helper for Adam (Gen. 2:20). This helper was brought to Adam for the purpose of working with him on whatever projects he was given to do (Gen. 2:21-22). This helper was not given a name until after Adam and the woman (Gen. 2:23) had sinned (Gen. 3:20). Throughout this process it was not deemed necessary for Adam to have more than one helper (Gen. 2:24). Jesus Christ confirmed that Almighty God had not changed His mind regarding this relationship between a man and a woman,

But he (Christ) answered and said (to the Pharisees), “Have you not read that the one who created from the beginning, He made them male and female, ⁵ And He said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave father and mother to be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?’ ⁶ So that they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has yoked together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:4-6; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Jesus Christ also pointed out that the original intent of creating Adam and the woman was to have a very close relationship between two individuals. The goal was to have them work together so harmoniously that they acted as one unit in total agreement (Mt. 19:6a). In practice it is hard enough for two individuals to attain this kind of unity let alone more than two.

After Cain killed his brother Abel, he was banished from the presence of God (Gen. 4:16). It is apparent from the conduct of Cain’s descendents that the will of God was not taught from generation to generation because Cain’s grandson Lamech took for himself two wives,

Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah (Gen. 4:19; NKJV throughout unless noted).

At this point it is important to note that God records the activities of mankind within His Holy Scriptures, whether their conduct is according to His will or not. Therefore, if it is recorded that someone has more than one spouse, it is not a reflection of God’s will. Instead, it is an historical fact that is simply written down

so that mankind can witness God's patience, love, and mercy for those He has created and hopefully they will learn from their mistakes,

Moreover, brethren, I (Paul) do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea (1Cor. 10:1).

But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ (called the Angel of the Lord in the O.T.; cf. Ex. 3:2; Ac.7:35; Nu. 20:16; Jdg. 2:1; 1Cor. 10:4), as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come (1Cor. 10:5-11; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Therefore, when it is written in Holy Scripture that Abram (Abraham) took Hagar as his wife, even though he was already married to Sarai (Sarah), it does not condone this act. Instead, it proves that mankind is weak and without God's help cannot please and obey Him (Mt. 26:41, Mk. 14:38; Rom. 8:3-8). It is natural for mankind to take matters into their own hands rather than trust and obey the word of Almighty God (Prov. 16:25), but the consequences are always problematic,

So he (Abraham) went in to Hagar and she conceived. And when she (Hagar) saw that she had conceived, her mistress (Sarah) became despised in her eyes (sight). Then Sarai said to Abram, 'My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes (Gen. 16:4-5a; cf. Gen. 29:15-35; 30:1-24; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Historically, the leaders of the Gentile nations took many wives as a right of their position of authority. In other words, the more wives a ruler had the more powerful he appeared to be, but God's leaders were not to follow this example,

When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations (Gentiles) that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he (the king) shall not multiply horses (associated with a standing army) for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' 'Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away (from Almighty God); nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself (Dt. 17:14-17; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Also, the religious leaders of ancient Israel were to set the correct example to the nation by marrying only one wife,

They (the Levitical priests) shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God (Lev. 21:7; cf. 13-15; Ed. note in parenthesis).

This same principle applies in the Second Covenant for those who are considered for leadership responsibilities,

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (overseer), he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife (1Ti. 3:1-2a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well (1Ti. 3:12; emphasis added).

For this reason I (Paul) left you (Titus) in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife (Titus 1:5-6a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The relationship of a husband with his wife is to reflect the relationship of Jesus Christ with his future wife, the church. Christ will not be married to many wives each possessing spiritual values and beliefs that are different than those he learned from his heavenly Father. Instead, Christ will be married to one wife - one body that reflects the spiritual values and truth of Almighty God. This was the goal from the beginning between Adam and the woman created for him, but it never came to fruition because of rebellion against the command of God (Gen. 2:17). Therefore, Christ's future bride has to be of one mind and purpose in complete harmony with the mind of Jesus Christ,

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phlp. 2:5).

This oneness of mind and purpose, that is in complete harmony with the will of Almighty God as expressed in His law and commandments, is described as a mystery by the apostle Paul,

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife (singular) loves himself (one husband). For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Eph. 5:28-29; Ed. notes in parentheses).

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become (a process) one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Paul is pointing out that the relationship between a husband and wife is to reflect the closeness between Christ and the church. Ancient Israel was supposed to emulate this same close relationship but sadly they went after many lovers,

All your lovers (Israel's alliances) have forgotten you; they do not seek you; for I (Almighty God) have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of your iniquities (sins, cf. 1Jn. 3:4), because your sins have increased (Jer. 30:14; Ed. notes in parentheses;).

Because Israel sought to follow the ways of the pagan nations around them, they were regarded as an adulterous wife that wanted to have many lovers,

You (Israel) erected your shrine at the head of every road, and built your high places (of pagan worship) in every street. Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband (God). Men make payment to all harlots, but you make payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite (Eze. 16:31-34ff; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Eventually, God gave the nation of Israel a certificate of divorce because they were not content to have one spouse,

Then I (God) saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also (Jer. 3:8; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The nation of Israel, which included the tribe Judah, made an agreement with Almighty God at Mount Sinai to obey Him. This covenant was a marriage agreement, which explains why God later divorced them for breaking it time and again. They wanted to have many relationships instead of remaining monogamous and faithful to the Only True God,

So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments (ordinances). And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do" (Ex. 24:3; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added)."

A similar marriage agreement is central to the second Covenant, and the apostle Paul refers to it,

For I (Paul) am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (cf. Lev. 21:14 below). But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached (a Christ considered equal to Almighty God who did away with his Father's law and commandments), or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it (2Cor. 11:2-4; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he (the High Priest; cf. Heb. 4:14) shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife (Lev. 21:14).

The sacrificial basis of the First Covenant had to be fulfilled through Jesus Christ because the people broke their marriage agreement (covenant) through association with foreign lovers (nations with pagan systems of worship),

For if the first covenant had been faultless then no place would have been sought for the second. Because finding fault with them (nation of Israel), He says: "Behold, the days are

coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant (Israel broke it after Mt. Sinai), and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind (cf. Phlp. 2:5) and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Heb. 8:7-10; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The First and Second Covenants both require fidelity to the Only True God and His law. No one can say they know Jesus Christ unless they agree that obedience to his Father's law and commandments is central to that relationship,

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of my Father, the one in the heavens.²² "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many powerful works?'²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me you workers of lawlessness!' (Mt. 7:21-23; RNT; cf. 5:17-20; emphasis added).

Almighty God established the marriage covenant between one man and one woman because it was intended to reflect the marriage between Jesus Christ and his future wife, the church. This wife is to be spotless and without blemish just as her husband is. They have to be in complete agreement and harmony regarding their faithfulness to the law and commandments of Almighty God,

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it (her) that he might sanctify and cleanse it (of sin) with the washing of water (through baptism) by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Any relationship other than a marriage between one man and one woman fails to represent the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church and, therefore, is contrary to the will of Almighty God.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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