

Study 0083

Practical Issues in Marriage (2)

We began to look at premarital issues that could adversely affect a marriage if not properly handled, in the last study. These issues are premarital sex, courtship, and the wedding ceremony. We concluded that premarital activities should generally be sanctified, and marked with the fear of God.

For believers in Christ, premarital sex is a ‘No! No!’, as it is dangerous and harmful to a marital union, in that people with whom those getting married have been sexually involved with after their salvation, become a part of their marriage (meaning that there are more than two persons in that marriage), as they are joined with them in a spiritual sense; and, even when the couple-to-be are involved in premarital sex with each other, they are desecrating their bodies, which is God’s temple, and can be disqualified from certain divine assignments (**1 Corinthians 6:15-20; 2 Timothy 2:20-22; Genesis 39:1-21; Luke 1:26-28**). Hence, premarital sex should be shunned, by ensuring that the flesh is crucified along with its passions and desires, and thus, immunizing them from temptation when it comes (**Galatians 5:24-25; James 1:12-16**). In practical terms, single Christians should set and keep ground rules for when they are in the company of the opposite sex; like when and where to meet, and, how to conduct yourself when around or with such a person.

Christian courtship is a time when the basis and tone of a marriage union is set, and, should be kingdom-oriented. It should be a time when the couple-to-be confirm their convictions as to how God led them to each other (**1 John 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**); discuss God’s assignment for them, and how they would go about it (**John 4:34-38**); devote ample time to prayer, particularly about the union; and, discuss issues like, family finances, extended family members and engagements, which friends to be close to, etc. We suggested a 6-month period for courtship but no more that 12 months, at the end of which the wedding should take place.

A Christian wedding should be simple, solemn, and sanctified in all aspects, including the traditional bit, and the reception (**John 2:1-10**). Christian weddings should be marked by moderation, as ostentation is unbecoming of a Christian! The traditional wedding should satisfy God’s requirement for parental consent and nothing more; the registry wedding is for the purpose of the legal documentation required for the change of name of the wife, obtaining a passport, and authenticity of the marriage as required by place of employment, and certain institutions; and, the church wedding is where God’s hand and seal is placed on the marriage union. All three forms of wedding can actually take place on the same day, and should be guided by God’s word. Women should not turn to carnal ways of getting married, by insisting on buying a ‘wedding gown’ which would only be worn once; baking cakes that reach up to heaven, all in the name of a memorable wedding which is never really remembered beyond that day, etc.; and men should not seek to please their friends who are yet to be born again, by providing them with alcohol, and allowing ‘Bachelor parties’, among others.

Scripture Text: Matthew 19:3-12

In this study, we shall focus on divorce, remarriage, and polygamy. In our churches today, it is not uncommon to find men and women, who were married in accordance with the word of God, but who are now divorced! Also, we find people who are divorced getting married again, while their spouses are still alive. In some cases, these remarriages are the second or

even, the third remarriage. But perhaps the most astounding of all are so-called ‘Christians’ who are getting married to people who are married (polygamy)! The danger for us as believers in Christ, especially, in the world that we live in today, is that soon, it will seem like it is okay to get divorced, be remarried even though your spouse is still alive, and be a second, third, or even a fourth wife, in an existing marriage.

Divorce

1. The bible makes it clear that:

- God hates divorce (**Malachi 2:16**)
- God never intended divorce as an option in marriage (**Matthew 19:8**)
- God does not advocate divorce as a solution to marital problems, even where one spouse is a believer, and the other an unbeliever (**Matthew 5:31-32; 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12-13**).
- God does not make two to become one, and then turn around and separate them again! (**Matthew 19:4-6**)

2. There is nonetheless a condition under which divorce may take place, and that is where there is fornication! (**Matthew 5:32**). One wonders why the translators of the King James Version of the bible used the word ‘fornication’ and not adultery or sexual immorality as some of the modern translations use. Be that as it may, we note as follows that:

- If the word is indeed fornication (premarital sex), then, it means that the man has only one chance (the night of consummation) to affirm that he has not married a virgin; and, he must himself be a virgin (**John 8:2-11**), for divorce to be permitted. And even at that, one needs to hear from God before an action like that can be approved (**Matthew 1:18-25**).
- If the word ‘fornication’ includes adultery (sexual immorality after marriage), then we must realize that the New Covenant holds its adherents to a higher standard, not only of morality, but also of forgiveness (**Hosea 3:1-5; Matthew 18:21-35**).

3. The reason the Lord gave for why people get involved in divorce is, “*hardness of your heart*” (**Matthew 19:8**). Please note that Moses did not command divorce, but made an allowance or a provision for a condition ascribed only to the old sinful nature—hardness of heart (**Acts 7:51**). A hardened heart is a stiff-necked and uncircumcised heart or a stubbornness and an unyielding heart, thus making the one who possesses such a heart, a rebellious person (**1 Samuel 15:22**) who:

- Refuses to listen to God’s voice (**Exodus 33:3**),
- Rejects God’s word (**1 Samuel 15:23**), and,
- Resists God’s Spirit (**Isaiah 63:10**).

It is clear that except a man or woman has crucified the flesh, and its passions and desires (**Galatians 5:24-26**), he or she cannot adhere to the Lord’s injunction not to divorce his or her spouse!

Remarriage (Mark 10:10-12; Romans 7:2-3)

The bible makes it absolutely clear that remarriage after a divorce is tantamount to adultery (**Luke 16:18**).

- If there is a separation between a man and his wife, then one of two things must follow: either they remain unmarried or be reconciled (**1 Corinthians 7:12**).
- Even when an unbelieving spouse leaves, God does not advocate remarriage (**1 Corinthians 7:15**).
- The only condition for remarriage is when one’s spouse has died. It is expected that such remarriage will not be immediate, for the living spouse would first have to hear

from God about remarrying, seek the pastor's counsel, and enter into courtship, before getting married. All these would take more than one year, at least (**Genesis 23:1-2; 24:1ff; 25:1-8**). And even at that, one does not expect any fanfare at the wedding.

Marriage to more than one spouse

The bible does not expect a man to be married to more than one wife; neither does it expect a woman to be in such a marriage. This is a problem in the Church of God today, because, many so-called 'Christians', unfortunately, cite the marital affairs of Jacob, David, and especially Solomon, among others, as justification for polygamy. However, the word of God is clear on the matter, "*For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh ... they are no more twain, but one flesh.*" (**Matthew 19:5-6**). Some very vivid points we need to make from the verses of scripture above are: the word 'wife' is used not 'wives'; and, the word 'twain' or 'two' is used, not three or more. We can thus infer that God only intended that one man will be married to one wife at any one time, and that only the death of one, can make marriage to another person possible (**Romans 7:2-3**).

Who Should Get Married?

After the Lord had answered the Pharisees in **Matthew 19:2-12**, His disciples' comment, "*It is not good to marry*" caused the Lord to state that only those who are unable to fulfil conjugal obligations in marriage due to physical impairment (due to birth defects, castration, or, sexual impotence); or due to a total devotion/consecration to the preaching of the gospel, and to the exclusion of everything else (**1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 7-9, 25-40**); can stay unmarried. The issues raised from the immediate scriptures, make it clear that unless you have been gifted to be celibate, you should get married. Do you burn with passion? Crucify the flesh! Is there a sister or brother you believe God is leading you to marry, then marry her or him! But there is more to getting married than our inability to stay celibate: a person who should get married should be born again, be living the crucified life, and, be willing to be tolerant of his or her spouse's faults (and we all have faults and make mistakes).

EXERCISE

Please state whether you **Agree** or **Disagree** with the statements below.

1. Under the New Covenant, divorce is permitted where sexual immorality occurs.
2. A believer in Christ, who knowingly marries an unbeliever because the unbeliever promised that he or she will get born again, can divorce the unbeliever, if the unbeliever does not get born again afterwards.
3. The only condition for remarriage while one's erstwhile spouse is still alive is, if the erstwhile spouse has remarried.
4. The only condition for remarriage while one's erstwhile spouse is still alive is, if the erstwhile spouse grants him or her, a divorce by a Law Court.
5. A Christian who becomes a second, third, or fourth wife may in fact, be God's way of bringing salvation to the man.
6. A Christian who knowingly becomes a second, third, or fourth wife, has to remain in that polygamous marriage, but should be excluded from ministry in the house of God.
7. A Christian who becomes a second, third, or fourth wife without knowing that she is in fact a second wife, is free to leave the marriage, and can remarry, even if she has had children in that marriage.
8. A woman who is not a first wife and now becomes born again, should leave the marriage, and can remarry.