

DID GOD REALLY SAY, “MARRIAGE IS FOR ONE MAN & ONE WOMAN?”

From the 10th chapter of Mark's Gospel, we listen again to verses 7 & 8:

⁷ *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,*
⁸ *and the two will become one flesh.'* So they are no longer two, but one.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Did God really say, “Marriage is for one man and one woman”? The simple answer is of course, YES. Not only is marriage intended for one man and one woman, God also designed it to be a lifelong union.

Fifty years ago, that answer would have been sufficient, because fifty years ago a majority of people in our country knew this truth of Scripture about marriage and agreed with this truth of Scripture about marriage and, in many cases, lived this truth of Scripture about marriage. But a lot has changed in this country in the past fifty years. In particular, the institution of marriage has come under fierce attack from people who contend that marriage is not just for one man and one woman, it should be for one man and several women or marriage should be for two women or for two men.

So this morning we look to Jesus' words in Mark chapter 10 for a more thorough answer the question: Did God really say, “Marriage is for one man and one woman”? The context of these words is evident from the first verses:

¹ *Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.* ² *Some Pharisees came and tested him . . .*

The Pharisees were part of the religious establishment in Jesus' day and they worked in opposition to Jesus. They were threatened by his popularity with the crowds, astonished at his miracles and diametrically opposed to his claim to be the Messiah. Here, as in many places in the Gospels, the Pharisees confronted Jesus to “test” him, to try to trip him up, to trap him into saying something they could use to discredit Jesus and his teachings.

² *Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"*

This may seem like a straightforward question, but it isn't. It is a reference to a well-documented debate going on in the Jewish community in Jesus' day. There was a huge argument over how to interpret a rather obscure passage in Deuteronomy 24. Those who followed Rabbi Shammai, said the only reason for divorce was “moral indecency” that is, marital infidelity or unfaithfulness. Those who followed Rabbi Hillel said anything in a wife that did not please the husband was grounds for divorce, even something as simple as burning his toast.

The Pharisees expected Jesus to side with one or the other Rabbi. If Jesus answered according to Shammai, they would come at him with Hillel. If he answered according to Hillel, they would hammer him with Shammai. And if Jesus said, never divorce, they would have the slam dunk case, “Are you speaking against what MOSES wrote?” But these “tests” never worked out the way the Pharisees

planned. They were never able to trap Jesus in his words. Because, as here, Jesus messed everything up by answering their question with a question:

³ *"What did Moses command you?"* ⁴ *They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."* ⁵ *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.*

Moses' regulation, which they quoted, was given to Israel because their hearts were hard. It was a concession to prevent hardhearted sinners from doing even worse, like spousal neglect, spousal abuse or even murder. It was an attempt to keep reasonable order in society and not at all a statement by which God approved of divorce. God is not saying, "You can divorce your spouse whenever you feel like it, just because divorce is permissible in certain circumstances." Just because the law allows divorce as a concession to hard-hearted sinners, does not mean that God condones it. God's plan never included divorce as Jesus made clear by quoting the principles God established for marriage in Genesis 2, the institution of marriage.

⁶ *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'* ⁷ *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,* ⁸ *and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one.*

Then Jesus gave the Pharisees his own judgment based on God's established principles:

⁹ *Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

Marriage is something that came from the mind of God. It is not a social development that we evolved into, over a span of millennia. We say that God is the "author" of marriage. It is his creation, his plan, and it comes with his guidelines. Marriage was God's plan, his gift to the very first humans, Adam and Eve at the time he created them. At the end of the sixth day of creation, *God saw all that he had made and it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31 NIV). All of God's creation, including marriage, was perfect.

From the account in Genesis 2 that Jesus quoted, we see that God ordained marriage to be the union of one man and one woman, and he established marriage as an institution for all of mankind with the words: ⁷ *For this reason (marriage) a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife . . .* God wasn't talking about Adam. Adam didn't have a father or mother to leave. These words convey the establishment of marriage for the rest of mankind, and the establishment of marriage involves one man and one woman. ⁷ *For this reason a man (singular) will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (singular),* ⁸ *and the two will become one flesh.*

With Adam and Eve, God created two genders, male and female. These two genders complement each other in many ways but, most notably, emotionally and physically. *The two* (male and female) *will become one flesh.* That's one of the blessings God intended for marriage, sexual activity, sexual fulfillment within the bonds of marriage. At the time of Moses, God gave a specific commandment, the 6th Commandment, to protect and preserve marriage. You shall not commit adultery. If there were any doubts beforehand, there were no doubts after the 6th commandment was given. Any and all sexual activity belongs within the bonds of marriage. This command leads to another blessing God intended for marriage, the gift of children. Before sin entered the world, God "blessed" the first man and the first woman, the first married couple, and said to them: *Be fruitful and increase in number.* (Genesis 1:28 NIV).

God started it all with one married couple, one man and one woman. That was the basic unit of society in the beginning, and it has been the basic unit of society ever since, one man married to one woman by mutual consent, along with their children. What a blessing and what an advantage for children to be raised and nurtured and trained and protected by a mother and a father. That has always been God's design.

Marriage is a public arrangement that needs to be established publicly. The way in which mutual consent to be married is made public differs by country and culture. Some governments require a marriage certificate, in others, a ceremony or public proclamation is sufficient. Whatever method is used, Christians want to establish the relationship publicly. God ordained marriage as an arrangement for society. Those who marry need to let those who live in their society know that they are husband and wife.

So what about polygamy? How about a marriage that involves one man and several women? This is not just a theoretical question. There are popular "reality" shows on television which chronicle the lives of people living in polygamist families. Mostly they are depicted as normal people, good people, people just like you and me. And after all, wasn't polygamy the accepted norm back in Bible times?

In Old Testament times we see that God "tolerated" polygamy. Again, just like the permitting of divorce, polygamy was probably "tolerated" because of sin-hardened hearts. It was a concession to prevent hardhearted sinners from doing something even worse, like slavery or rape. Polygamy was regulated (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) but nowhere did God approve it or condone it.

The first polygamist in recorded history is a man named Lamech. This was not the Lamech who was Noah's father, but a man who lived five generations after Cain. Besides boasting about his sin of murder he also had two wives. Lamech the murderer seems to be the person who introduced this practice into society. Look carefully at the Biblical accounts of polygamist families. It wasn't all happiness and harmony as depicted in "Sister Wives" or "Big Love."

The prophet Samuel's mother Hannah was one Elkanah's two wives. We read in 1 Samuel 1 that Hannah's "sister wife," Peninnah *kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.* (1 Samuel 1:6-7 NIV). That sounds like a cheery household. The rivalry between Jacob's two wives, Rachel and Leah, is legendary - and they really were sisters! The account of their fierce competition and raging jealousy is recorded in Genesis 30 . . . not a happy household by any means! There were not a lot of blessings associated with polygamy, only a lot of family trouble and disharmony.

But perhaps the saddest and most destructive result of polygamy came about because of King Solomon's wives. ⁷ *On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.* ⁸ *He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.* 1 Kings 11:7-8 (NIV). Solomon's foray into polygamy poisoned the nation of Israel with idolatry. This horrible sin plagued Israel until they were conquered and sent into the Babylonian captivity.

In New Testament times, the Christian church did not allow polygamy. They took the words of the 6th Commandment at face value. (1 Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6). In Old Testament times, the Lord may have "tolerated" polygamy, but he did not condone it or accept it. If there was ever a time for the Lord to incorporate polygamy into his plan, it would have been at the time of Adam. Wouldn't it have been easier

for Adam to *"increase in number and fill the earth"* if he had a few more wives? But in the beginning God ordained marriage as the union of one man, Adam, and one woman, Eve as husband and wife.

So what about same sex marriages? Scriptures defines marriage as the life-long union, by mutual consent, of one man and one woman as husband and wife. So according to the author of marriage there could not be a "Scriptural marriage" of two men or two women.

A government may choose to call such a relationship a "marriage" so that the two partners can access the financial benefits available to "spouses" under insurance, tax & estate laws. But that does not make this arrangement a "Scriptural marriage."

But more importantly, it is clear in Scripture that God does not condone homosexuality, he does not approve of "alternate lifestyles," he calls it a sin. (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). While God is the author of marriage, he is not the author of homosexuality. God does not make a person gay. Sin makes a person gay. The cause of homosexual thoughts, desires and actions is the human heart. *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.* (Matthew 15:19).

Even though we are all prone to sin, one sin may tempt one person more than another. For example, studies suggest that some people have a physical makeup that makes them more susceptible to alcohol abuse. The same could be said for other sins. Some people are more tempted to sexual sins than others. Some struggle against the sin of materialism more than others. Some struggle to control their anger, while others have a quiet disposition. Sin affects us all. But it affects us in different ways. We all have to fight harder against the sins that we are most prone to commit in comparison with someone else who might not be tempted at all by the sins that tempt us.

As "straight" Christians, we may find the sin of homosexuality especially disturbing. But remember, the same things that encourage us to be angry, lazy, hateful, stingy, selfish and lustful also encourage the homosexual to be homosexual. God condemns all sin as worthy of eternal death. It is only through faith in the life and death of our Savior, Christ Jesus that we are saved from the punishment our sins deserve. Any Christian who opposes homosexuality in anger or hatred needs to look at Galatians 5:19–21, where the Apostle Paul speaks of sexual immorality and hatred in the same sentence as the sins of those who will not inherit the Kingdom. Secondly, it is important to remember that sin not only displeases God, it harms the individual who sins (and others). Therefore, as the Bible tells us that homosexuality is a sin, opposing it is based on a desire to prevent spiritual harm. Opposing any sin should be based on love and concern for the truth of God's Word and love and concern for the sinner.

Every person who is involved in the sin of homosexuality is a soul created and redeemed by Christ. Acceptance of that person as a creation of God does not mean condoning that person's sin. True Christian love does not give permission for what God forbids. True Christian love warns a person of his or her sinful lifestyle and lovingly calls that person to repentance. God forgives all sin through faith in Jesus. When the Bible tells us "*. . . the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin,*" (1 John 1:7 NIV) this includes all sexual sins.

Our society's attempt at redefining marriage reflects the increasing blindness our culture already has toward Biblical truth. True marriage, between one man and one woman, is described in Ephesians 5 as a "profound mystery" (Eph. 5:32) brought into existence by God to display the loving relationship between Christ (the Groom) and his church (the Bride). The changes in our society's view of marriage

continue to veil God's intention for marriage, and ultimately, by masking God's truth, we rob him of his glory.

God has given to mankind the gift of marriage to be a source of blessing. When his guidelines are followed, marriage can be the source of some of the greatest earthly blessings. Let's thank God for this gracious gift and work to preserve the truth of God's Word for future generations. Amen.