



Front Cover

POLYGAMY VS GOD'S WAY

Christianity has been called a counterculture, since it often finds itself in opposition to the folkways and mores of established culture and society. Followers of Christ make no apology for this since we follow Him who is responsible for the creation of man and therefore knows the best practices for those He has created.

John says of Him: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

Our Maker obviously knows what our needs are better than anyone else. If we want to know how marriage and family are to be established and conducted who would know better than He who created marriage and family? Our world is made up of many different races and cultures with many different concepts of marriage and family.

This is one of the things that makes our world an interesting and varied place. In most cases, these variations are not in conflict with the principles God has revealed in His word. Sometimes, however, even our ancient and revered practices are found to be in conflict with the wishes of our Creator. That is when we must reexamine these practices and, painful though it may be, bring them into alignment with what He wishes. Such is the case with widespread and ancient practice of one man having two or more wives, or, polygamy.

Polygamy: poly-many and gune-wives = "a many-wived man." Let us notice, first of all, some Bible examples of this practice.

BIBLE EXAMPLES OF POLYGAMY

Genesis 4:19-24: “Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. ... Then Lamech said to his wives: ‘Adah and Zillah,

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‘hear my voice; O wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.’ ” In this passage we see that Lamech, the first polygamist, was a descendant of Cain. But Lamech is not to be recommended as an example for us since he was a murderer like his ancestor and a selfish braggart as well.

Genesis 16:1-6: “Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

“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. The Lord judge between you and me.’ So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please.’ And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.”

Here is a tender story with an unhappy ending. Because Sarai seems unable to bear children, she persuades Abram to take her maidservant, Hagar, as wife in order to give him an offspring. Abram agrees and Hagar conceives. The spiteful jealousy that results is a common thread that weaves through most accounts of polygamy in the Bible (Genesis 21:8-11).

Genesis 26:34-35: Esau, the firstborn of Isaac and Rebekah married two Hittite women, Judith and Basemath. “They were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.” The New American Standard Bible puts it this way, “... they made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah.”

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Judges 8:30-35: Gideon (Jerubbaal) had seventy sons, for he had many wives. Gideon was a great and brave leader but one wonders what kind of a father he could have been to seventy sons.

I Kings 11:3-12: King Solomon's downfall was directly related to his practice of polygamy. In verse three it is simply stated, “And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart [after other Gods].”

II Chronicles 11:18-21: Solomon's son, Rehoboam, had 18 wives and 60 concubines producing 28 sons and 60 daughters. Again one wonders if effective childrearing is possible with numbers like these. We have no direct statement as to how polygamy affected Rehoboam's life, but we must take note that this is the man who, as king of Israel “... forsook the law of the Lord” (II Chronicles 12:1). But someone might argue, if God is so opposed to the practice of polygamy, why did He allow it? Why does He seem to even condone it at times?

As Olan Hicks writes, when polygamous practices developed later on God did not condemn it and sometimes even seemed to be involved in the matter. For instance, in order to punish Saul, God gave his wives to his neighbor as a punishment to him (II Samuel 12:7-11). Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines without losing favor with God until they turned his head to go after idols (I Kings 11:3-4)

“... when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (Genesis 6:1-2).

Immediately after this the Bible records that “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). (Olan Hicks, *What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 1987, pp. 20-21.)

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It can not be denied that polygamy is an ancient, worldwide practice. It is significant, however, that God never made more than one woman for Adam. In fact six generations will pass before there is any account of polygamy. It may also be meaningful, that the first practice of polygamy occurs in the descendants of Cain, one who was under the curse of Yahweh (Lord of Host) for the murder of his brother.

It may be that what Jesus said regarding divorce applies to the practice of polygamy also. The Pharisees came to Jesus and “They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so’ ” (Matthew 19:7-8).

THE BIBLE PRINCIPLES AGAINST THE PRACTICE OF POLYGAMY

Genesis 2:23-24: As we have already seen Christ clearly teaches that monogamy is God's will. Regarding Eve, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." The word "wife," is definitely in the singular, ruling out "wives."

The Holy Spirit makes this very clear in the comparison of the relationship of the church to Christ with the husband's relationship to each other in marriage. "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). Christ is not the head of many bodies! He is the head of His one church! Many churches or many bodies are excluded. The comparison made here is to a monogamous marriage. Polygamy is impossible!

Deuteronomy 17:17: Commands are given concerning Kings. As we have noticed, God's laws were not always respected by those who ruled over His people. Very simply it is stated, "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away." Solomon is the sad example of one who did not respect this law.

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Malachi 2:14: God made them one. He speaks in the singular as He tells us not to deal treacherously with the wife of your youth because she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Matthew 19:4-8: Verse 6 of this passage is apropos to our discussion. Here Jesus says, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

I Corinthians 7:2: The temptation of immorality is always with us. This is the reason that Paul urges us by inspiration, "... let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband."

I Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:6: There is no more responsible position in the church than that of overseer (elder, shepherd). He, along with his fellow elders, is responsible for the spiritual welfare of the flock (Acts 20:17-35). He must live above reproach as an exemplary leader. Among other qualifications, he is to be the "husband of one wife." Paul further states that he must be "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence" (I Timothy 3:4). We have already seen the inherent difficulties of maintaining control of a polygamous household. Beginning in Genesis 30 we see Jacob's polygamy is the source of strife and jealousy. It seems this is always the results. In this case, the results are a matter of history: brother sold brother into Egyptian slavery.

DISADVANTAGES OF POLYGAMY

Polygamy disregards God's original purpose and plan of one man for one woman for life. The woman is degraded to a sexual plaything and a breeder of children with no hope of anything better.

C. Caverno, in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* writes: "When it comes to wrong in sex relations, man has the advantage, and it has given him the field covered by the word polygamy. There he is master and woman is the victim. We have now no longer the helpmeet originally destined for man,

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bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh for whom he would leave his father and his mother and to whose single self he would cleave for life."

David's Polygamy (II Samuel 13): Had dire consequences; incest and murder and Absalom's treason and death.

Solomon's Downfall (I Kings 11:1-3): It can be accurately said that Solomon's political aspirations and the resulting polygamy led to the division of the kingdom. Parenthood suffers and family values are destroyed since there is no chance for fulfilling a mother's and father's duties to the numerous offspring of polygamy. It becomes an impossible task.

Consider Gideon (Judges 8:30-31) and Rehoboam (II Chronicles 11:3-8) just to name two. We see in Scripture that polygamy did not produce good parents. It is hard to be a good parent or child under such a system. There usually is a short supply of love and attention. The wives and children are constantly playing games of "one-up-manship" in the quest for power and position.

Divorce Problems Similar: The problems produced by polygamy are striking in their similarity. Writing about practices in the United States, Wernick notes, "This practice [of maintaining stresses] seems to have practically disappeared, but it has been replaced by a new kind of serial polygamy that has been made possible by easy, repeated divorce followed by remarriage." Polygamy establishes several small family groups in one household. The same thing happens today with divorced parents bringing together the children of different spouses and attempting to establish a cohesive family unit. Polygamy is destructive of the peace of family life. (*The Family* by Robert Wernick and the editors of Time-Life Books, page 35, 1974, Time, Inc.) This can continue for many generations since children are prone to follow the example of their parents.

Jealousy: The account of the jealousy between Leah and Rachel, the plural wives of Jacob, illustrates the destruction of peace that polygamy can produce, while in I Samuel, we have

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the story of Hannah. Elkanah, her husband created jealousy and destroyed the peace of mind of both of his wives by showing preference for Hannah. Peninnah took out her jealousy on Hannah.

EXAMINATION OF HISTORIC AND CURRENT PRACTICE

Polygamy was, at one time or another, the common practice of the ancient people on all continents. However, after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity (about 537 B.C.), there is no mention made of the practice of the Jews as well as the Greek and Roman cultures. By contrast, in medieval Europe, the principle of one wife at a time did not gain substantial acceptance until the eighth century. "Kings and nobles of the sixth and seventh centuries kept concubines, maintained multiple wives and repudiated one wife to take another with no more formality than a word and gesture." (Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The Kings Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, Athens, Georgia, 1983, pp. 73-74.)

Mormon Practice. The Mormons have practiced both monogamy and polygamy under their "prophets." The current teaching is to be found in Doctrine and Covenants, section 132, verses 1-4, 19-20, 34, 38-39, 52, 60-62. It is a justification by founder Joseph Smith of his personal practice of polygamy or, as they refer to it, "plural marriage." However, prior to 1876 the same Doctrine and Covenants, section 109, verse 4 contained a condemnation of polygamy along with fornication.

In 1876, Mormon leaders inserted a revelation supposedly received by Joseph Smith in 1843, which justifies the practice of polygamy. Subsequently, they eliminated the condemnation from all editions of Doctrine and Covenants printed after 1876 or they would have had both approval and condemnation of polygamy printed in the same book! Of course, this practice of changing Mormon doctrine to suit the times or those in charge is nothing new to this particular cult. Here is an example: for many years, those of African descent were not allowed in the priesthood because they were supposedly under the curse of Ham.

After the Civil Rights unrest of the sixties and seventies in the United States, this doctrine was changed to harmonize with the national mood. Likewise, while the Mormons do not officially practice plural marriage these days (it is illegal in the United States) it is still very much a covert practice in areas where Mormonism is strong.

Islamic Practice. Islam has always taught that "men are in charge of women." The Koran says, "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other and because men spend their wealth to maintain them." Mohammed also stated that although there have been many perfect men, there have been only four perfect women; one of which is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

This attitude toward women is inherent in all types of polygamy and Islamic practice is no exception. Although Mohammed, when he died, had ten wives, the Koran later limited the number of wives a man may take to four (the number of concubines was left unchanged). In "The Chapter of Women" the Koran says, "... marry what seems good to you of women, by twos or threes or fours; and if ye fear that ye cannot be equitable, then only one ..." E.H. Palmer Translation.

Christians* do not practice polygamy. We believe that God wants the home to consist of one husband and one wife and the children they have produced or adopted. See Bible Principles Against the Practice of Polygamy above. It is obvious from our study that God is not pleased with the practice of polygamy. Those who want to be pleasing to Him should give up this practice and also the practice of divorce. "Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

*Christians are people who believe in God. We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We trust that His sacrifice of Himself upon the cross has paid the price for our sins. Because of this faith, trust and belief, we have changed our minds about sin and made a decision to turn from the practice of it. We have verbally confessed that we have faith in Him as our Lord and have been immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, to

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enter Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Please read these passages from the Bible.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' "

Romans 10:9-10: "For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' "

Romans 6:3-6: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

Galatians 3:26: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"

I Peter 3:21: "There is also an antitype that now saves us, namely baptism."

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