

Sex

Marriage

&

Divorce

In the Context of the Islamic and Christian Religious Traditions

Attitudes to Sex amongst Religious Communities

Christianity

Attitudes towards sex can differ markedly not only between religions but also within the same faith.

Take for example the issue of **Contraception**: Within Christianity the Roman Catholic Church teach that contraception is wrong, it is considered to be unnatural within the context of *Natural Law*.

Yet other Christians have claimed that contraception, when used responsibly, can lead to safer sexual practices and avoid unnecessary pregnancy. Contraception can be used by Christians who are married (as well as those who have sex before marriage). This is what the Methodists have to say on the matter:

“The Methodist Church believes that responsible contraception is a welcome means towards fulfilment in marriage, the spacing of children, and the need to avoid pregnancy altogether, for example for medical reasons.

With the use of contraception, the relational and re-creative aspects of intercourse can play their full part in the development and healing of a marriage.”

Sex Before Marriage

Not all Christians approve of sex before marriage. ...

Brainstorm why:

A) Some Christians would want to have sex before marriage; and B) Why some Christians might cohabit.

Roman Catholicism	The Quakers	The Salvation Army
The Teaching		
<p>“Human beings share in the creative nature of God, and the proper context for this is marriage. The sexual act should reflect the total self-giving of two individuals in love, through marriage.”</p>	<p>“ Sex outside marriage does take place – Quakers are not isolated from changes in social attitudes ... However, though there is a much wider recognition now than, say 50 years ago, that a couple can be faithful to each other in a loving, non-exploitative relationship outside marriage, Quakers have not decided to change the marriage regulations, which still see marriage as something different – God’s work, to use George Fox’s words.”</p>	<p>“[The S. A. believe] that such a relationship [cohabiting] still falls short of God’s ideal will. This, as revealed in scripture, is for sexual union to be expressed in the context of marriage, whereby a man and a woman commit themselves to one another for life. The S. A. believes that cohabiting without marriage is not in the best interests of society or individual partners or their offspring. Nevertheless, the Army readily assists people, materially or spiritually, who adopt this life-style, while not condoning the life-style itself.”</p>

The Islamic View

Muslims believe that **sex before marriage** is wrong – it is referred to as **fornication**: The following quotations are taken from an article you can find on the web at: http://www.al-islam.org/m_morals/chap3.htm#anchor440949



Pre-marital sex is absolutely forbidden in Islam, no matter whether it is with a girl-friend or a prostitute. Pre-marital sex is fornication (*zina*).

Allah says: *Do not go near adultery, surely it is an indecency, and an evil way [of fulfilling sexual urge].* (17:32) Fornication and adultery have severely been condemned in the saying of the Prophet and the Imams. In Islam, pre-marital sex is considered an immoral act against the rights of Allah and one's own sexual organs.

Such a view is unequivocal in its condemnation of pre-marital sex and Muslims should only think of having sex – which is considered a great gift from Allah – in the context of marriage. Indeed, it is considered wrong to be celibate (as some Priests are in Christianity) as that also goes against God's direct wish for humans to bring children into the world. Sex is seen as a way of leading to peace and avoiding extremes of behaviour:



“The prophet Mohammed said: ‘*Muslims should not go to their wives like animals but should send a messenger.*’ When asked what this ‘messenger’ was, he replied, ‘*The tender kiss or pleasant talk.*’

Contraception is seen as a useful tool within a marriage to help with family planning as this will help the well being of all those in the family environment. However, contraception should only be used by those who are married and then it should be a preventive contraceptive not one that causes the abortion of a foetus, such as the morning after pill or the IUD method. However, there are some Muslims (like the Roman Catholics in Christianity) who feel that contraception is wrong as it interferes with Allah's plan for the universe and that nature should be allowed to take its course.

Religious Understandings of the Purpose of Marriage

Christians and Muslims share many beliefs about the reasons why people should get married. Look at the two diagrams below and compare the reasons both faiths encourage people to get married, as well as how their tradition supports those reasons.

Sex is a strong human urge. Marriage is the acceptable place to express that God given desire.

“And among his signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may live in peace with them.” **Surah 30.21**

“He who is able to marry should marry.”

Hadith

Marriage is an act pleasing to Allah because it is in accordance with his commandments that husband and wife love each other and help each other to make efforts to continue the human race and rear and nurse their children to become true servants of Allah.

“A man named Al-Aqra ibn Habis visited the Prophet and was surprised to see him kiss his Grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, ‘Do you kiss your children?’ he asked, adding that he had ten children and never kissed any of them.

A solid family life teaches people about the essential nature of kindness, consideration and the noble qualities humans should show.

The need for children to be supported, nurtured and educated is a primary one. The security of the family environment provides this.

‘That shows you have no mercy and tenderness at all. Those who do not show mercy to others will not have Allah’s mercy shown to them,’ commented the noble Prophet.”

Hadith

Human beings need company and marriage can provide us with a lifelong companion and supporter.

Islam

Marriage is seen by Christians as the right environment to bring up children.

Christianity

Some Christian traditions teach that marriage is a sacrament that allows the couple to receive the grace of God in their new lives.

“Marriage is the sacrament in which a baptised man and woman vow to belong to each 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.” **The Catholic Truth Society**

Marriage is a rite of passage into adulthood and the establishment of one’s own family.

Marriage is seen as a life-long commitment between two people to nurture and support each other for ever.

Marriage is a commitment of love and fidelity in front of God, family, friends and the community.

Marriage is seen as the proper place for sexual relationships as sex is accorded a special status in Christianity.

“Marriage is a gift of God in creation ... a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God’s purpose that husband and wife shall be united in love as Christ is united with his Church.”

The Anglican Marriage Service

Religious Understandings of the Character of Marriage

In Christianity marriage is seen as the stronghold of family life. Its character should be characterised by an atmosphere of **love, support and commitment** to one's husband or wife and to the children in the family.

The Church sees it as particularly important to prepare couples for marriage as it is seen as being a life long commitment and thus people need to be properly prepared for it. The preparation will make sure that the couple know what they are getting into and that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to sustain their relationship through its changes.

This commitment is best summed up in the marriage vows:

The marriage is only the rite of passage that leads the couple into their new life, it is this new life that is the real challenge in living up to these promises.

Many Christian families live in the Western world and thus have a different family structure to Muslims. Most Christian families live in a **nuclear family**, which is the parents and children. This is opposed to the **extended family** we find in other cultures where grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all live together and provide an enlarged support group to the family.

*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.*

*It is important to recognise that Christians see the
role of men and women differently in marriage.
Some stress the equality of the sexes.
Other Christians see men and women as having
distinct roles in family life.*

Pope John Paul said that: ***“All members of the family ... have the grace and responsibility of building day by day the communion of persons making the family a school of deeper humanity.”***

This means that it is not only the parents who are responsible for the children, but the children are also responsible for making the family environment loving and nurturing. Christians would often refer to the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments for evidence of this where it is written: ***“Honour your Father and Mother”***.

The Church sees the family as a stabilising institution that should be nurtured and supported by the Church itself. The Church should provide a loving, supportive community that can help families who may be having problems to overcome those problems and remain positive.

Using your research skills, construct a diagram that shows the role Christians see marriage and the family playing in the lives of the Christian community. Include quotations.

The Islamic View

Marriage in Islam is seen as a social contract which binds two Muslims together. Marriage is the place for sexual activity and raising children.

The general principle held by Muslims is that prophet (pbuh) enjoined the followers to marry. He said "*when a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion , so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half.*" (Hadith). Islam greatly encourages marriage because it shields one from and upholds the family unit which Islam places great importance.

<i>Roles in Muslim Marriages</i>	
<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintenance of his wife and the family. ▪ A marriage gift for his spouse to ensure her independence. ▪ To treat his wife with equity, respect, kindness and consideration. ▪ To be faithful. ▪ To be a good Muslim. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To care for and support her husband and children. (In some societies this may involve taking a job as well). ▪ To maintain and protect the family home. ▪ She should be faithful to her husband (which includes not being alone with other men). ▪ To be attractive to her husband. ▪ To be a good Muslim.

The marriage itself is a partnership. Women and men are considered equal as only Allah is the master of human beings. However, it is generally accepted within Islam that men and women have different roles, yet even though those roles are different, both are as vital to the community as the other.

Women are also required to be **obedient** to their husbands.

However, obedience in Islam is not seen as a repressive thing but rather:

“The purpose of obedience in the relationship is to keep the family unit running as smoothly as possible. The man has been given the right to be obeyed because he is the leader and not because he is superior. If a leader is not obeyed , his leadership will become invalid -Imagine a king or a teacher or a parent without the necessary authority which has been entrusted to them. Obedience does not mean blind obedience”

A women should only obey if her husband asks her to act in accordance with Islam.

The Muslim family is often an extended family as Muslims see the extended family as giving greater support and nurturing than the nuclear. It allows the elderly to impart experience and the young to learn about consideration, respect and care for other people.

“Your Lord orders you ... be kind to your parents ... speak to them in terms of honour.” (Surah 17. 32-34)

Parents need to discipline children to ensure they are good Muslims and are not spoilt. However, children should be encouraged to develop themselves and act in a responsible way.

The Religious Perspective

It has become tradition in Christian societies that young people choose their marriage partners for themselves. They generally meet someone, fall in love, propose marriage and then tell their parents of their intentions. This form of partnership making is called a **love marriage**. Those who support this method will say that it allows a couple to know fully the person they intend to marry, know that they will be able to commit to them for life and feel that they know themselves best so as to make the right choice.

Other cultures, Islam and Hindu being two examples, have a more formal structure in choosing partners and arranging marriages. Muslims, for example, believe that the parents should be involved in preparing the ground for their children. This form of marriage is known as an **arranged marriage**. Islam does not allow for young people of opposite sexes to interact freely and so the parents will generally arrange a partner for their children. This is not as dictatorial as people in the west make out as parents desperately want happiness for their children and will introduce them, whilst being chaperoned, to different potential partners so their children can have their say too.

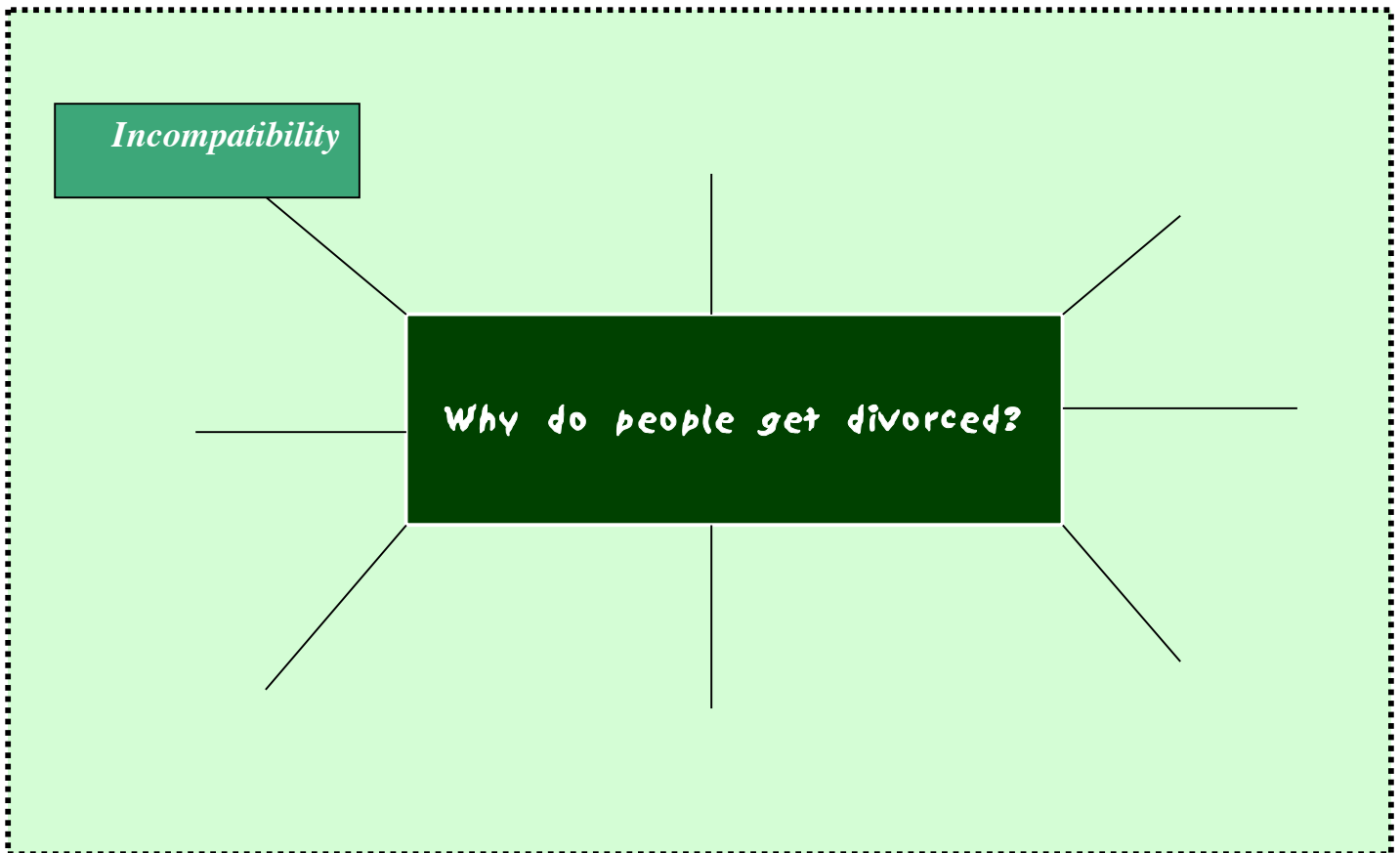
Advantages and Disadvantages of the different marriage arrangements

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>Marriages based on falling in love with a partner</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents do not make bad choices for their children by trying to make political or social choices. ▪ Choosing a life partner is a personal choice and one's freedom to choose should not be interfered with. ▪ Making choice – good or bad – is part of growing up and being an adult. ▪ To meet and date different people is important in gaining life experience to make the right marriage choice. ▪ Love is something that many people feel has helped their marriages to remain strong and that without that love, the marriage could easily have failed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is easy to make a bad choice as one is swept with emotion or is too young to really know themselves. ▪ As parents are not officially involved in introducing or arranging the marriage, their views on suitability are often ignored by defensive offspring which can then lead to splits in the family and parents not supporting the marriage. ▪ Love only lasts so long, the couple have then to build a solid relationship in other ways and this can be difficult when the reality hits.
<i>Arranged or introductory marriages.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents often know their children better than the children think and can make a wise choice in terms of background and personality. ▪ People often make mistakes or make (inappropriate) emotional choices. The parents choosing safeguards against this. ▪ As the family approve of the partner they will be more supportive of the newcomer and the marriage itself. ▪ Marriage is about bringing two families as well as two individuals together (given the place of the extended family) and so parents must be involved. ▪ Arranged marriages are not forced, the children take the final decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents can marry their children off too young or inappropriately for social and cultural reasons. ▪ It is unlikely that different cultures will intermarry and this, some people would argue, is a shame in terms of breaking down prejudice based barriers as parents often make conservative choice within the religious community (which would also exert pressure in this area). ▪ This can put enormous pressure on children and families (certainly in Western society) who resist their parents and wish to make their own choices.

Religious Attitudes to Divorce

In Britain today 1 in 3 of all marriages end in divorce. Divorces are legal in this country and can be granted when a couple have demonstrated that their relationship is no longer working or if one or other of the partners has behaved abusively or had an affair.

Divorces happen for many reasons in our high pressured society:



Now you have discussed and filled the table in, discuss whether or not you and the other members of your group feel divorce is:

- a) *Perfectly acceptable*
- b) *A necessary evil*
- c) *Something that should be banned and couples counselled*
- d) *Any other reason you come up with.*

You should all try and argue each perspective and note down why people might support that position and then gauge that positions strengths and weaknesses.

Christian Perspectives on Divorce

Christians, perhaps unsurprisingly given your studies of abortion, are split over this issue. Some Christians see divorce as an acceptable event in the face of a declining marriage – even if they are saddened by a marriage failing. Other groups of Christians, specifically the Roman Catholic Church, believes the marriage bond to be indissoluble as it is a bond created by God; thus, divorce is not ever recognised by the Church.

Three Christian Perspectives on Divorce:

The Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland take the view that although divorce is not the ideal result of a marriage, it does happen. As it is traumatic people should be supported and loved not alienated or marginalized.

The Church of Scotland do allow remarriages to take place in Church on the basis that the couple show a sincere and real commitment to their new relationship.

This view is based on the example of Jesus who showed forgiveness to people who had gone through difficult situations in the New Testament. Jesus chose to love and support not to judge and condemn.

The Church of England go to:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/view/hobmarriage.html>

“Everything that contributes to the breakdown of a marriage offends against God’s love. It harms the community as a whole, and quite specifically harms the partners and their children. But it is unwise, and may also be uncharitable, for those outside the marriage to attempt to say precisely where the fault lies in any case. Should domestic violence and abuse take place, the Church must condemn it frankly, and offer appropriate support to its victims. At deeper levels of responsibility for breakdown, however, the Church is not interested in assigning blame to one partner or the other but in helping people accept responsibility for what they have done. Partners to a broken marriage need to search themselves honestly, and to overcome the temptation of always blaming each other, the circumstances, and so on. At the heart of the gospel is a warning against self-justification; we need this warning especially when we are trying to cope with the sense of shame and humiliation which is almost inseparable from the experience of marriage breakdown.”

The issue of remarriage is a serious one for Anglicans as some do not feel that remarriage of divorcees should be allowed to happen in Church. Some people feel that this is an unsympathetic attitude – especially if a marriage has been abusive – even if they agree that marriage should be preserved at all costs. This has led to conflict as some Parish Priests have refused to conduct marriages of divorcees and others have no problem with it. This has led to the Church making the following statement:

“One key feature for all those who have been divorced but wish to remarry in church are its proposed guidelines as to the circumstances when this might happen. It is an attempt to obtain general alignment whilst recognising that to marry or not to marry remains the prerogative of the parish priest.”

The Roman Catholic View: (Go to: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05054c.htm>)

“In Christian marriage, which implies the restoration, by Christ Himself, of marriage to its original indissolubility, there can never be an absolute divorce, at least after the marriage has been consummated.”

However, in certain circumstances:

“Christian marriage before consummation can be dissolved by solemn profession in a religious order, or by an act of papal authority.”

Islamic Perspectives on Divorce

Islam does permit divorce, however, the basic attitude that one should have on getting married is that it will last for life. A divorce would be very disruptive in Islam, the family is the bedrock of the muslim community and to have that disrupted, even destroyed, is not in keeping with Islamic teaching. Thus, if a marriage were in trouble, the community would seek to offer support and marriage counselling in order to restore harmony to the marriage.

In the case of a divorce in a muslim marriage, the couple must go through a waiting period called an *iddah*. During this period, which normally lasts three months, the couple are given a chance to think again before their divorce becomes final. If, during the *iddah*, the couple want to try and patch things up then there is no need for a remarriage.

Remarriage is permissible in Islam:

"The widow and the divorced woman shall not be married until their order is obtained, and the virgin shall not be married until her consent is obtained."

(Al Bukhari)

"And when you divorce women, and they have come to the end of their waiting period, hinder them not from marrying other men if they have agreed with each other in a fair manner. "

(2: 232)

Women are allowed to divorce men in Islam, even if it is the case that the man is the decision maker in the house. This can be done either by a woman having the option to initiate divorce proceedings into her marriage contract, or she can take her request to a Shari'ah Court who will decide her request for her.

Divorce in Islam can come about for many reasons, adultery, desertion, the breaking of the *niquah* (the marriage contract) or abuse (both mental or physical). The wife will keep her wedding gift and the husband cannot demand it back (unless she has been immoral) as that gift was designed to guarantee the woman's security.

Find out:

- What makes a divorce valid?
- Does the man have to pay maintenance? If not, why not and what arrangements are made instead?
- Write out exactly what the conditions of initiating and completing a divorce are.

© RJM, October 2002

The Shari'ah

Shari'ah is the Islamic religious law which is based on the commands written in the Qur'an. Scholars will interpret the verses in the Qur'an and then apply them to real-life situations to make a decision that is in accordance with God's law.