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Women's Rights

&

Marriage Rulings between Christianity and Islam



By

E-Da`wah Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Marriage or Celibacy & Right to Marriage	4
Polygamy.....	8
Spouse Choice & Divorce Freedom	13

Introduction

Women's rights are always used for vilifying Islam and espousing Christianity on the pretext that Christianity is mostly deemed more equitable towards women in terms of marriage rulings. The E-Da`wah Committee is pleased to present this publication to explore women's rights in terms of marriage rulings between Christianity and Islam.

Marriage or Celibacy & Right to Marriage

Marriage ensures the decency of woman and man on an equal footing. However, marriage is more beneficial to woman than man for it provides her with a caretaker and custodian rather than just



a male. This can be available only within legitimate marriage. Out of wedlock, a woman cannot have a caretaker and custodian within an honorable, decent framework.

On the contrary, man can dispense with the benefits which he may get from a wife in an illegitimate way. He may buy both sexual gratification and housekeeping with money.

Anyway, despite the considerable benefits marriage provides for man and the more considerable benefits it does woman, Christianity recommends celibacy and misogamy.

In the New Testament, we read the following verses:

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." (1 Corinthians 7:1)

"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." (1 Corinthians 7:8)

"Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a

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woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.” (1 Corinthians 7:25-28)

“I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

“So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 7:38-40)

Needless to say, monks and nuns are under an obligation to remain celibate so that the “celibacy vow” will not be broken, following in the footsteps of Mary and her son, Jesus Christ.

However, though such imposition of celibacy goes against the human nature, and what is more, is not provided for in the Bible, it still involves equality between man and woman. Yet, the imposition of celibacy on women goes farther than that in Christianity to such an extent which oversteps the bounds of justice and equality.

Christianity prohibits widows and divorcees from remarriage and prohibits men from marrying them. It deems their desire for marriage a sort of a lack of dedication to Christ. We read: "As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry." (1 Timothy 5:11)

Christianity warns against marrying divorcees and likens marriage with a divorcee to that with an adulteress. In the New Testament, we read: "And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:32) We also read: "And whoever will take her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

As for Islam, it makes it incumbent on all able-bodied men who can afford marriage to marry. At the same time, it makes it lawful for all unmarried Muslim women to get married.

Anas reported that three men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to inquire about the worship of the Prophet. When they were informed, they considered their worship insignificant and said: "Where are we in comparison with the Prophet while God has forgiven his past sins and future sins?" One of them said: "As for me, I shall offer Salah all night long." Another said: "I shall observe fasting continuously and shall not break it". Another said: "I shall abstain from women and shall never marry". The Prophet came to them and said, "Are you the people who said such and such things? By God, I fear God more than you do, and I am most obedient and dutiful among you to Him, but still I observe fasting and break it; perform Salah and sleep at night and take wives. So whoever turns away from my Sunnah (tradition) does not belong to me". (Bukhari and Muslim)

The prohibition of celibacy is provided in the Qur'an which blames monks for celibacy and monasticism they innovated. In the Qur'an, God says:

Monasticism, which they innovated; we did not prescribe it for them (Al-Hadid57:27)

When it comes to the right to marriage, there is no discrimination against any class of women. All of them, be they virgin or previously married, are entitled to get married.

The Qur'an urges the Muslim community to help unmarried Muslims, be they men or women, freemen or slaves, get married. In the Qur'an, God says:

And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and female slaves. If they should be poor, Allah will enrich them from His bounty, and Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing. (An-Nur 24:32)

Consequently, Islam did not impose a ban on the marriage of divorcees and widows as Christianity does. Prophet Muhammad's marriages can be held up as examples when it comes to giving all women the right to marriage. He married both virgins and previously married women as well. He even married only one virgin, namely Lady Aishah (may God be pleased with her). Still, all of his other wives were previously married women, i.e. widows or divorcees.

To conclude, Islam makes a male caretaker and breadwinner available for each woman within an honorable, decent framework, forbids all forms of extramarital sexual gratification, and grants each woman the right to marriage, be she is virgin or previously married on an equal footing.

Polygamy

Indeed, polygamy is subject to bitter controversy between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians who allege that their divine message permits marriage with just one wife. Let's discuss this topic and expatiate on what Islam and Christianity really say about it.



Christians often claim that their divine message provides for marriage with only one wife and prohibits polygamy. In support of their claim, they quote some verses from the New Testament. For example, we read: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach." (1 Timothy 3:2)

We also read: "A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well." (1 Timothy 3:12)

We further read: "If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain." (Titus 1:6-7)

However, in the above verses, we observe that marriage with only one wife is something Paul imposed in his epistles on bishops and deacons rather than average Christians. Moreover, Jesus Christ never specified the number of wives, nor do we find an explicit verse in the New Testament which

obligates average Christians to marry just one wife or prohibits them from marrying more than one wife.

It is curious enough that the above teachings of Paul are contradictory and inapplicable within the clerical circles themselves. Though the above verses may be seen as encouraging monogamy, we observe that in other verses Paul discouraged marriage in principle even with only one wife. Instead, he recommended celibacy.

In the New Testament, We read the following verses:

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."
(1 Corinthians 7:1)

"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." (1 Corinthians 7:8)

"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

Needless to say, monks and nuns are under an obligation to remain celibate so that the "celibacy vow" will not be broken, following in the footsteps of Mary and her son, Jesus Christ.

Now, should a monk not marry or should he marry just one woman according to Paul? What about the average Christian man? Should the verses quoting Paul as recommending

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monogamy prevail over the other verses recommending celibacy or vice versa or what??

Monks and nuns supposedly remain celibate, that is to say they do not put Paul's teachings concerning monogamy into practice. How can the verses quoting him as recommending monogamy be applicable to the average Christians if they are not applied by monks and nuns?

It goes without saying that Christians follow the Mosaic Law, which according to the Old Testament even in its current form, permits polygamy. In the Old Testament, we read: "Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah." (Genesis 4:19)

About Prophet Solomon, the Old Testament says: "Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines." (1 Kings 11:2-3)

About Prophet David, the Old Testament says: "And David took more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David." (2 Samuel 5:13)

The Old Testament tells us that Prophet Jacob had several wives and concubines, including: Leah (Genesis 29:23), Rachel (Genesis 29:30), Bilhah (Genesis 30:4), and Zilpah (Genesis 30:9).

The Old Testament also tells us that Prophet Abraham had several wives, namely Sarah (Genesis 17:15-16), Hagar (Genesis 16:1-3), and Keturah (Genesis 25:1)

So, what is the conclusive evidence for the prohibition of polygamy from the Bible? It has become crystal clear now that polygamy is permitted according to the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, Jesus Christ did not prohibit polygamy in explicit terms therein.

Since Islam is the final extension of the previous divine messages, it also permits polygamy given the benefits it offers to mankind, but it does not make it obligatory or even recommend it. On the contrary, it discourages and restricts it in such a way which is deemed in the best interests of woman in the first place by limiting the number of wives to four wives only, stipulating both physical and financial ability as well as justice and equity as far as possible, and recommending marriage with only one woman by virtue of explicit, unequivocal texts included in the Qur'an. For example, in the Qur'an, we read:

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]. (An-Nisaa` 4:3)

We also read:

And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah – then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful. (An-Nisaa` 4:129)

It is reported that Prophet Muhammad said to Ghailan when he embraced Islam while having ten wives: "Keep four and divorce the others." (Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah)

It is also reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah that Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever has two wives and gets

more inclined towards one of them, he will come on the Day of Resurrection with half of his body inclined towards one side.” (Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa`i, and Ibn Majah)

Now, it has become evident that the previous divine messages – Judaism and Christianity – permitted polygamy but did not limit the number of the wives or stipulate justice and equity unlike Islam. We do not find any conclusive evidence not contradicting other evidence in the Bible which recommends monogamy for average people, not just bishops or deacons only.

Spouse Choice & Divorce Freedom

As a matter of fact, one of the most important freedoms which man requires for feeling happy in his life is the life partner choice freedom given the intimate relationship and the common destiny with such a partner.



The ways the various divine messages handle such freedom differ in terms of permission and restriction. Therefore, we will indicate how Christianity and Islam deal with such freedom.

Undoubtedly, Christianity imposes tight restrictions on the woman's life partner choice freedom. This is represented in the prohibition of her divorce from her husband whatever the reasons for separation, her compulsion into marriage with her brother-in-law when her husband happens to die according to the Mosaic Law, and her coercion into marriage with her rapist by restricting her choices to either marrying him or accepting equal dowry from him, instead of the imposition of such a harsh penalty which protects girls and deters men from raping them.

Let's review those rulings deemed prejudiced against women one by one as set out in the Bible. We will begin with the prohibition of divorce in Christianity. The New Testament quotes Jesus as saying: "It was also said, 'whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery,

and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:31-32)

The New Testament relates to us the following situation involving a conversation between Jews and Jesus Christ:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:3-9)

The New Testament also reports to us the following conversation between Jesus and his disciples:

But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:6-12)

About the widow’s obligation to marry her brother-in-law after her husband’s death, the Bible says: “If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his

widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her." (Deuteronomy 25:5)

We notice that the Bible regards woman as a part of the deceased husband's inheritance which is inherited by her brother-in-law unless he gives up this part of inheritance quite willingly, but the woman cannot choose her next life partner.

Now to the marriage imposed by the Mosaic Law on the raped girl with her rapist by restricting her choices either to marry him or accept dowry from him. We do not know if the raped girl's marriage with her rapist is a penalty imposed on him or her! Are the retaliation for the raped girl and the penalization of her rapist represented in imposing him on her as a husband or just accepting equal dowry from him? Does this not serve as encouragement for men to rape girls? Where is the penalty for rape? Is this penalty the imposition of the rapist on his female victim so that he will remain her lifelong husband or just the acceptance of an equal dowry from him? Is the penalty meted out to the culprit or the victim?

In this regard, the Bible says: "If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days." (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)

It also says: "If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins." (Exodus 22:16-17)

As for Islam, it gives woman absolute freedom to choose her life partner at all points of time throughout her lifetime. A virgin girl has the right to choose her life partner. Abu Hurairah reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "A previously married woman should not be given in marriage except after consulting her; and a virgin should not be given in marriage except after her permission." People asked, "O Messenger of God! How can we know her permission?" He said, "Her silence (indicates her permission)." (Bukhari & Muslim)

Ibn `Abbas reported that a virgin maid went to Prophet Muhammad and stated that her father gave her in marriage against her will. So, Prophet Muhammad gave her the choice (between marriage and separation) (Ahmad, Abu Dawud, and Ibn Majah)

A Muslim woman is entitled to divorce if good company with her husband is impossible, in which case divorce can take place by mutual agreement, with all legitimate rights reserved for the woman.

If the woman does not blame her husband for faults in his character or religiousness but she dislikes his company, she may negotiate *Khula`* with him, that is to say to obtain a divorce in return for a waiver of some of her post-marital rights. In this regard, God says in the Qur'an:

Divorce is twice. Then, either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment. And it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of God. But if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of God, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of God, so do not

transgress them. And whoever transgresses the limits of God – it is those who are the wrongdoers.([Al-Baqarah](#) 2:229)

Ibn `Abbas reported that the wife of Thabit bin Qais came to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God! I do not blame Thabit for defects in his character or his religion, but I, being a Muslim, dislike to behave in an un-Islamic manner (if I remain with him)."

Thereupon, the Messenger of God said (to her), "Will you give back the garden which your husband has given you (as a dowry)?" She said, "Yes." Then the Prophet said to Thabit, "O Thabit! Accept your garden, and divorce her once." (Al-Bukhari)

When a Muslim woman is divorced from her husband, she has the right to marry whomever she likes to marry. In the Qur'an, God says:

But if they separate [by divorce], God will enrich each [of them] from His abundance. And ever is God Encompassing and Wise. ([An-Nisaa`](#) 4:130)

Accordingly, a Muslim woman has the right to choose her life partner as she likes. A certain man cannot be imposed on her, be she virgin or previously married. It is the same if this man is her brother-in-law or rapist, unlike Judaism and Christianity.

Thus, Islam allows woman complete freedom to choose her life partner unless the impossibility of good company required for marriage by Islam is foreknown just like marriage with certain men such as temporarily and permanently unmarriageable men, including non-Muslim men and ex-husbands who divorced their wives thrice.

However, a woman can still remarry her ex-husband who divorces her thrice but only after she marries another man

and such marriage ends in either divorce or the husband's death. About that, the Qur'an says:

Divorce is twice...And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until [after] she marries a husband other than him. And if the latter husband divorces her [or dies], there is no blame upon the woman and her former husband for returning to each other if they think that they can keep [within] the limits of God. These are the limits of God, which He makes clear to a people who know. (Al-Baqarah 2:229-230)

Again, the Bible prohibits an ex-husband from remarrying his ex-wife considering that she is defiled by marriage with another man and that is abomination before the Lord. We read: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord." (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

At last, it is quite safe to say: how good is the vastness of Islam, and how bad is the narrowness of the other false beliefs and corrupted faiths!