

# Marriage and Divorce

General, Christianity,  
Catholic Christianity

## Marriage in the UK — Things have Changed

- 1) The number of marriages taking place in the UK each year has been decreasing over the last 40 years. People are also tending to get married later in life, and many people have children without being married.
- 2) Same-sex marriage is legal in England, Scotland and Wales. Many see this as good as it creates equality.
- 3) Although many non-religious people still see marriage as important, others see it as unnecessary. It's now more common (and acceptable) for people to cohabit (live together) — either before marrying or instead of getting married. Cohabiting couples don't have the same legal rights as married ones though.
- 4) Divorce is also far more common. Non-religious people often see it as sensible if the couple don't get on, as they'll be happier if they divorce. Some argue parents fighting can harm children more than divorce. People might apply situation ethics (looking for the most loving outcome in each situation) — even if they value marriage highly, they might see divorce as the best option in some situations. However, many religious people see marriage as very important, and try to avoid divorce if at all possible.

## Christians think Marriage is Important and Holy

Pope Francis said marriage is 'indispensable' to society  
(Not just Good, but Beautiful).

- 1) The Christian faith values marriage very highly — marriage reflects the union of Jesus with his followers.
- 2) Marriage is a covenant (contract) between two people to offer love, support and commitment, and to have children. Christians see marriage as sacred — they talk about the 'sanctity of marriage'.
- 3) Many accept cohabitation, especially as preparation for marriage. Some don't — they disagree with sex outside marriage. The Catholic Church tends to be against it, but Pope Francis has recognised it can be hard for people to marry, e.g. for financial reasons — but they should be encouraged to marry eventually.
- 4) Faithfulness in marriage is important — adultery is forbidden in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14).

## Christians are Divided Over Same-Sex Marriage

- 1) The decision to legalise same-sex marriage in the UK was criticised by the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Many members of the clergy are against it.
- 2) But some Church of England clergy hold blessings for same-sex couples after they marry in civil (non-religious) ceremonies.
- 3) It's splitting the Anglican Church. Supporters of same-sex marriage say Christians should be loving to all and should support anyone who wants to marry. Those against it say it's a sin. They also think it's wrong because one of the main purposes of marriage is having children.
- 4) The Catholic Church is more strongly against homosexual relationships and same-sex marriage.

"The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is ... a union... of one man with one woman." Canon B30

## Different Christian Churches have Varying Attitudes to Divorce

- 1) There are different views about divorce — many think it breaks the sanctity of marriage.

The Roman Catholic Church says it's impossible to divorce (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2382). Marriage is a sacrament — God made the couple one flesh, which can't be undone. However, a marriage can be annulled (declared void) if the couple never had sex or if a partner didn't consent to or understand the marriage, or refused to have children.

The Church of England says divorce is possible and accepts that some marriages fail. Divorcees can re-marry in church if they find a minister willing to marry them. Some Church members disagree with this.

Nonconformist Churches (e.g. Baptists and Methodists) will usually re-marry divorcees, but an individual minister can refuse to do so if it goes against their conscience.

- 2) Jesus himself was anti-divorce, but in favour of forgiving people's sins.

Matthew 19:8-9 NIV says divorce and remarriage are only allowed if someone's partner's been unfaithful.

"A man [and] his wife ... will become one flesh. ... what God has joined together, let no one separate." Mark 10:7-9 NIV

In John 8:2-11, Jesus forgives a woman who's committed adultery. But he tells her, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (NIV).

- 3) Some Christians view an unhappy marriage as a waste of two lives, and so see divorce as preferable.



# Marriage and Divorce

Marriage is very important in Islam — Muslims are advised to marry.

## Marriage is Strongly Recommended in Islam



- 1) Marriage provides companionship, love and stability. Muslims believe marriage is Allah's will — it says in Qur'an 24:32 "marry the unmarried among you" and 30:21 "He created for you ... mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection...".
- 2) Islam is family-oriented, so marriage is important. It's a secure environment for having children (procreation). Cohabitation often isn't accepted as it tends to involve sex outside of marriage.
- 3) According to a hadith, Muhammad said that marriage was half of a Muslim's faith.
- 4) Qur'an 4:1-24 clearly sets out rules for who people can marry and how much different people inherit.
- 5) Nikah is the name for marriage under shari'ah — Islamic law. To have the marriage recognised as legal in Britain, couples must also have a civil wedding ceremony.
- 6) Some Muslims have arranged marriages. This is where the parents will choose a marriage partner for their child. However, both potential partners have the right to say no to marrying their parents' choice.
- 7) Polygamy is criticised by many Muslims, but others believe the Qur'an allows it. A man should only take multiple wives if he can treat them equally. Some criticise the fact it's only allowed for men. Polygamy is illegal in the UK, but polygamous marriages are accepted if they took place elsewhere.
- 8) Adultery is a sin — the Qur'an calls it "evil" (Qur'an 17:32). Some Muslim countries punish it severely.

## Same-Sex Marriage is a Controversial Topic in Islam

- 1) Many Muslims are against same-sex marriage as they believe homosexual sex is forbidden by the Qur'an (see p.37). The Muslim Council of Britain spoke against the law legalising same-sex marriage in the UK, arguing it was unnecessary because civil partnerships gave same-sex couples equal rights anyway and that same-sex marriage undermined the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman.
- 2) Some Muslims see it as wrong because marriage is partly for having children. However, some Muslims do support same-sex marriage. They argue that homosexuality is normal and that it's good for same-sex couples to have the chance to be married, as marriage is important in Islam.
- 3) Others have argued that, since Muslims are a minority in Britain, they should help out another minority by supporting same-sex marriage, regardless of their individual views on homosexuality.

## Divorce is the Last Resort, but it's Accepted

"Of all the lawful acts the most detestable to Allah is divorce."  
(Sunan Abi Dawud 12:2173)

- 1) Divorce is permitted, but only as a last resort. If things aren't going well, an arbiter from each family should be appointed to try to sort things out.
- 2) Muslims see reconciliation as particularly important when the couple have children.
- 3) Qur'an 2:226-241 lays out the conditions under which divorce can happen. In both Sunni and Shi'a Islam, it's possible for a man to divorce his wife by saying 'I divorce you' three times. Some Sunni Muslims believe all three can be said at the same time, but not everyone agrees with this. In Shi'a Islam, 'I divorce you' must be said once a month for three months, and two people must witness it.
- 4) Both believe in having an iddah (waiting period, often of three months) to allow time for reflection. The waiting period also ensures the woman is not pregnant.
- 5) A woman can divorce a man in this way (divorce 'by talaq') if it was written into her marriage contract. Otherwise she has to apply to a shari'ah court for a divorce 'by khul' (if her husband agrees to divorce) or a tafreeq divorce (if the husband doesn't agree). After divorce, men and women are free to re-marry.
- 6) As Islamic law isn't part of British law, these kinds of divorce dissolve the nikah, but don't count as a legal divorce if the couple also had a civil marriage — they would have to get a civil divorce too.

## Phew, what a lot of different opinions...

Summarise Christian or Muslim beliefs and teachings on marriage and divorce in your own words.





# Marriage and Divorce

## Judaism

The family is a **key** part of the Jewish **faith**, so **marriage** is **important** within Judaism.

### Marriage is Important in Judaism

- 1) To Jews, **marriage** is an **emotional**, **intellectual** and **spiritual** union. Many see it as the proper context for **sex** (seen as natural and God-given) and **having children** (procreation), but it is also for **companionship**.
- 2) Marriage is seen as a **sacred** thing — the word for the first part of the wedding ceremony, **kiddushin**, means **sanctification**. God **recommends** marriage — in **Genesis 2:18** he says "It is not good for the man to be alone" (NIV) and then creates Eve to accompany Adam.
- 3) **Adultery** is seen as **sinful**, as it goes **against** the **7th commandment** (**Exodus 20:14**).
- 4) Marriage and children **continue** the Jewish **faith**, as it's passed on through the **family**.
- 5) This means there's often some **anxiety** over '**marrying out**' — marrying someone who **isn't Jewish**. Jews who have '**intermarried**' are **less likely** to carry on Jewish **customs** and **practices**. '**Intermarriage**' is more **accepted** than it used to be though.
- 6) **Orthodox** Jews don't tend to **cohabit** because sex outside of marriage is seen as wrong. **Progressive** Jews see cohabitation in a more **positive** light, but ideally the relationship should be **stable** and **long-term**.
- 7) Technically, the Torah **allows** polygamy for **men** — Abraham had **two** wives, for example. But almost no Jews today are in **polygamous** marriages.

"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord." **Proverbs 18:22 NIV**



### Same-Sex Marriage is a Divisive Topic in Judaism

- 1) **Liberal** and **Reform** Judaism both backed same-sex marriage **before** it became **legal** in the **UK**, and **both** hold same-sex weddings in their **synagogues** now that it's legal.
- 2) Jews who **support** same-sex marriage refer to **Genesis 1:27**, "God created mankind in his own image" (NIV) — they say being **homosexual** can't be wrong, as people have been **created** homosexual.
- 3) Many **Masorti** Jews **support** same-sex marriage. They have created a **shutafut** (**partnership**) ceremony for same-sex marriages or civil partnerships — this is different from the traditional **kiddushin**.
- 4) **Individual rabbis** in all **3** movements can choose **not** to hold same-sex weddings if they **want** to though.
- 5) **Orthodox** Jews **don't** tend to support same-sex marriage, believing it goes **against** the teachings of the **Torah** on homosexual sex. There's a **growing recognition** though among some Orthodox Jews that homosexual Jews need to be **welcomed** in synagogues and **supported**.

### Divorce is Allowed, but it's the Last Resort

- 1) Jews **accept** that some marriages don't work out, and that it's **better** for a couple to **divorce** than to stay together and be **unhappy**. But **divorce** is a last resort after all attempts at **reconciliation** have **failed**.
- 2) The **Torah** teaches that a husband and wife "become one flesh" (**Genesis 2:24 NIV**) when they **marry**, so divorce is **difficult** and shouldn't be entered into **lightly**. However, Maimonides' **Mishneh Torah** (Ishut 24) sets out **conditions** for when divorce should happen, e.g. if a man knows his wife has committed **adultery**.
- 3) Traditionally, a **woman cannot** initiate divorce. This has caused an issue for **Orthodox** women who can't get their husband to agree to a divorce, as they **can't remarry** in a **Jewish ceremony** without a **get** (**divorce certificate** issued by Jewish courts). Women in this situation are known as **agunot** (**chained women**). **Wives** can also **refuse consent** for a divorce, but this happens **less often**.
- 4) **Reform** synagogues recognise **civil divorces**, but people may want a **religious divorce** too. A Reform Jewish court **can** issue a **get** even if the husband won't agree. Reform Jews **don't need** a **get** to remarry.

### There's a lot to take in here...

...so go back over anything you're not sure about. Then test out your new knowledge by jotting down two different Jewish ideas on each of these topics: marriage, same-sex marriage, and divorce.

