Religion and Human Relationships

Roles of men and women in the family

Traditional roles in a Christian family

* Some Christians interpret Genesis as evidence that men are superior to women.
* In Genesis God fashions woman out of the rib of Adam to be his helper.
* Some Christians look to the Bible for evidence that the man is meant to be the head of the family.
* The Church of England still allows the option in the vows for the woman to ‘love, honour and obey’ her husband.
* Some Christians look to Mary, Jesus’ mother, as a role model for obedience.
* St Paul also gave his advice to the Early Church that women should obey their husbands.
* Because Eve was tempted by the devil in the garden of Eden, many men argue this means women are weaker.

**Bible quotes suggesting equality:**

‘There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.’ (Galatians 3:28)

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

Judges 4:4 - Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

“There is neither...male or female ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

1 Corinthians 11b–12a

‘... woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.’

**Against equality:**

1 Corinthians 14:34 – ‘The women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak… they

1 Peter 3:1 - ‘Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,’

Ephesians 5:22–23a

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church.

**Traditional roles within the church**

* Many Christians think of the members of their religion as one big family.
* St Paul taught that women should be silent in church.
* Some Christians argue that because Jesus chose 12 men as disciples, only men should be leaders within the church.
* Roman Catholics argue that Jesus chose St Peter to be the head of the church. Peter became the first bishop of Rome. Catholics believe the pope (Benedict XVI) is the successor of St Peter.
* Orthodox and Roman Catholics do not permit women priests.
* The Church of England ordained its first women priests in 1994.
* Both Baptists and Methodists allow women to become ordained as ministers.

**Women in the Gospels**

* Some Christians look to the Gospels and Jesus’ treatment of women as a guide to how women should be treated in society and the church.
* The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) encourages women to reflect on God’s word.
* Women were present at the foot of Jesus’ cross when the rest of the disciples hid in fear.
* The first people to discover that Jesus’ tomb was empty were women.

Marriage

How does the marriage ceremony reflect Christian teachings?

Each part of the marriage ceremony has a meaning which is closely linked to Christian teachings about marriage and family life:

• The ceremony takes place in a church because promises are made in front of God.

• The priest asks the couple and the congregation if there are any reasons why this marriage cannot go ahead. This is to show that the Christian marriage is legally binding.

The priest asks both the bride and the groom if they want to marry the other person. This is to show that Christian marriage is a relationship, that is entered into freely and no one has forced them to marry.

• Having children and bringing them up in the Christian faith is an important part of marriage and the priest explains this to couples in the opening address.

•Couples say their vows in the presence of God and the congregation of Christians as witnesses, showing the sacred importance of the ceremony.

• Prayers, Bible readings and the priest’s talk teach the couple about the importance of love in a marriage.

• A ring is given to symbolise the unending nature of love and of Christian marriage. This shows a marriage is for life.

As part of the marriage ceremony, the priest asks the bride and groom ‘Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?’

Homosexuality and civil partnerships

Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. - Romans 1:27

There are many places in both the Old and New Testament which condemn homosexuality:

"Homosexual acts are an abomination to God." Leviticus 18:22

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error." Romans 1:26-27

Many Christian churches condemn same-sex relationships.

Some Christians like the Quakers are less judgemental about homosexuality and actually allow homosexual couples to get married in their meeting rooms.

Divorce

Christian beliefs about the ethics of Divorce Christian teachings and the marriage ceremony both show Christians that marriage is intended to be a relationship for life. Marriage is a holy relationship and the vows a couple make are made in front of God and should never be broken. The ring given in the marriage ceremony symbolises that love is unending and that Jesus taught that marriage is for life. These beliefs mean there is much debate within Christianity about whether it is right or wrong to permit married couples to divorce. Roman Catholic beliefs about the ethics of divorce. The reasons discussed above lead Roman Catholics and some Protestants to believe that divorce is wrong. They understand that not all marriages succeed and the Church will give a couple all the assistance it can to help them resolve their differences. When that fails the Catholic Church permits a couple to separate and live apart. It does not allow either of them to re-marry or to have a sexual relationship with anyone else because that would be adultery. In exceptional cases the Catholic Church can officially annul a marriage. This declares that the marriage was not a true marriage and it is cancelled. The situation is the same as if the wedding had never taken place. An annulment can be granted if one of the couple was under-age, forced to marry against their will or unaware of what they were doing due to diminished responsibility. An annulment can also be granted if a marriage is not consummated (The couple do not have a sexual relationship after marriage).

The Catholic Catechism says’... men and women... in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive

Church of England beliefs about the ethics of divorce

Although the Church of England and most Non-conformist Churches believe that marriage is for life, they accept things may not always work out. If this happens the priest will help a couple try to resolve their difficulties. If they are unable to, the Church of England accepts that divorce may be the kindest thing for all concerned because it ends conflict and enables the couple to begin a new life.

•Divorce is permitted because Jesus taught that the right course of action is the most loving thing to do. Forcing a couple to remain trapped in a loveless marriage would hurt them and everyone in their family, which cannot be right.

• Some Christians believe a marriage ends when love dies between the couple, as well as with the death of a partner.

•Others point out that Jesus did allow divorce for unfaithfulness.

•Jesus lived in a Jewish society almost 2000 years ago, so some Christians believe it is right to interpret his message in the light of today’s society and permit divorce. Only the Orthodox Church will grant a religious divorce. Otherwise it is a civil matter that is dealt with through the courts. The 1996 Family Law Act permits divorce for the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage which may have occurred because of adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, two years’ separation with consent or five years’ separation without consent.

Mark 10:10–11

Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

Christian beliefs about the ethics of re-marriage

Some Christians, such as Roman Catholics, do not accept re-marriage in church after a civil divorce. Other Christians accept re-marriage because Jesus also taught the importance of forgiveness if someone has made a mistake. However, not all Christians permit a second marriage ceremony to take place in church because the divorced partner would be making promises in front of God which they have already broken once. The Church of England will accept either re-marriage in church, or a church blessing following a register office ceremony such as the Prince of Wales had. Because some vicars do not believe it is right to make promises which have been broken once, the Church allows them to refuse to carry out a re-marriage ceremony. The couple must marry in another church or with another priest.

Beliefs about sexual relationships

Christians believe that sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed by a couple as an act of love within their marriage and in order to have children. Because sex is a relationship that has been blessed by God, Christians believe that casual sexual encounters are wrong. There are many passages in the Bible which teach that sex outside marriage is forbidden. The seventh of the Ten Commandments forbids adultery, and some Christians interpret this as meaning that all sexual activity outside marriage is wrong. Jesus also condemned adultery in the gospels (Mark 10:7–9). This leads some Christians, such as Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants, to reject all sexual relationships outside marriage. They believe a person should remain a virgin until they are married and have no other sexual partner during their marriage.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is very clear about sexual relations: ‘The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin’ All Christians prefer sexual relationships to take place within a marriage because it provides a stable environment for bringing up children. However, some Christians are prepared to accept pre-marital sex as part of a loving relationship if a couple are committed to each other and plan to marry. This is because Jesus taught that love was what mattered most.