

Sex, Marriage and divorce.

What you need to know:

- Religious attitudes towards sex before marriage and outside marriage.
 - Reasons for contrasting religious views towards contraception and divorce.
 - Religious understandings of the purpose and character of marriage.
 - Religious responses to the issues of love, parental involvement and choice in the choice of marriage partners.
 - Application of sacred texts, religious principles and statements by religious authorities to sex, marriage and divorce.
 - Concepts of **commitment**, responsibility, **contract** and **covenant**.
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Religious attitudes towards sex before marriage:

Christianity teaches that sex before marriage is wrong for the following reasons:

- Sex belongs within marriage.
- It is a gift from God demanding responsibility commitment and total love.
- It is wrong to use people as sex objects.
- Chastity is important for example, 'true love waits' pledges not to have sex before marriage.
- Sex can create a new life.
- St. Paul urged sexual restraint and control.
- It would be irresponsible for a Christian to risk pregnancy or spread sexually transmitted diseases.

No religion is in favour of sex before marriage. It is forbidden in all of the religions.

Religious attitudes towards sex outside marriage (adultery):

Christianity teaches that adultery is wrong for the following reasons:

- It breaks the promises people make when they marry.

- It is against the commandment: 'Do not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:14).
- It is against Jesus' teaching: 'you have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery". But now I tell you: anyone who looks at another woman and wants to possess her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:27 - 28).
- It usually involved deception, breaking trust - honesty is essential to marriage.
- It threatens the stable relationship needed for children's security.
- It is against the purpose of marriage.

Religious view towards contraception and divorce:

Contraception:

Christianity views on contraception vary. All Christians believe in 'responsible parenthood'; children should be wanted and welcomed. The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches teach that the use of artificial contraception within marriage is wrong (absolute marriage). The Roman Catholic teaching is based on the following reasons:

- Contraception goes against one purpose of marriage; to have a family.
- Using artificial contraception might encourage infidelity.
- Artificial contraception is against the law of nature, but the rhythm method is acceptable.
- Every sexual act should have the possibility of creating new life, according to the Pope (*Humanae Vitae*, 1968).

Most Christian churches allow contraception if both partners agree to use it. The method is up to them. Their reasons include the following:

- If couples wait, they will have more money, so children will be wanted and have the proper care and attention they need.

- Methodists accept contraception for 'spacing' children so the mother's health is not harmed by too many pregnancies and for helping the couple to develop their relationship more fully before such a commitment.
- In an overcrowded, poverty ridden world, it would be unfair to bring a child into a life of deprivation.

Divorce:

All Christians agree that, ideally marriage is for life. Jesus taught that no one separate what God had joined together and that anyone who divorced and re-married was committing adultery (Mark 10:1 - 12). The Church must keep marriage sacred but needs to love and care for those who are divorced.

Roman Catholics see marriage as a sacrament that cannot be undone until death parts the couple. The couple cannot re-marry. Annulment is the only possibility (absolute morality).

The *Church of England* now allows divorced couples to re-marry in Church with the bishop's permission.

Muslims think of marriage as a contract so divorce is allowed as a last resort but it is hateful to Allah (Hadith). The couple must wait three months (Iddah) to see if the wife is pregnant and to allow reconciliation if possible. 'If you fear a breach between a man and his wife, appoint two arbiters, one from his family and the others from hers. If both want to be brought back together, Allah will settle things between them' (Qur'an, Surah 4:35). The man must return any dowry and must provide for her until she re-marries. A wife can divorce her husband, but if it is not his fault, he does not have to support her and she must repay the marriage gift (mahr). He still has responsibility for his children's support in all cases.

The purpose and character of marriage:

Purpose:

- Love: Companionship through good times and bad.
- Sex: to control and direct the sexual instinct.
- Children: to have children and bring them up according to God's will.

Character:

- Faithfulness: Sexual fidelity.
- 'Until death do us part': a lifetime's commitment before God.
- A spiritual bond: a chance to develop trust, faithfulness, mutual consideration, reverence and love.
- A contract or covenant with particular responsibilities to love, care for and be faithful towards one's partner, and to bring up children in a secure, loving way.

Other religions also think marriage should be for companionship, for a proper sexual relationship, for opportunities to develop spiritual qualities, and it should have faithfulness in commitment.

Love, parental involvement and race in the choice of marriage partner:

Christians believe that love is essential to marriage. Parents are not usually involved in the choice of partner but would hope that their child would marry someone who shares their Christian values. However, some Christians living in traditional societies have arranged marriages. There is no objection to race. Christians believe in equality.

Within Islam parents usually arrange marriages. They look for someone who would be personally compatible, from a similar social background, and sharing sound religious beliefs and values. Islam views all races as equals and religious values are more important than race.

Practice questions:

1. How are parents involved in the choice of their children's marriage partners in two religious traditions?
2. Besides bringing up children, give two other purposes of marriage according to a religious tradition.
3. Explain how a Christian marriage relationship is a 'covenant'.
4. Give three reasons why a Christian would regard adultery as wrong.