

Polygamy

- Do not be expecting to find a rule in the New Testament concerning polygamy. There are only two rules: trust God, love people. The rest we need to figure out from there.
- The purpose of the marriage between a Christian man and a Christian woman is to model the relationship between Jesus and His church (Ephesians 5:21 – 33).
 - A secondary purpose is as an appropriate outlet for sexual desires (1 Corinthians 7:9).
 - Marriage between two Christians is a choice (1 Corinthians 7:25 – 38). Being single is good, too.
 - Within an existing mixed marriage, evangelism is the purpose (1 Corinthians 7:12 – 16, 1 Peter 3:1 – 6).
 - The marriage between two non-Christians is not addressed.
- Can polygamy fit into the Christ-and-His-church model?
 - There is one body (Ephesians 4:4).
 - The church is called the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23, 28, 30)
 - The body of Christ image is always singular (Hebrews 13:3, Colossians 3:15, 2:17, 2:19, 1:18, Ephesians 4:16, 3:6, 2:16, 1:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12 – 27, 10:17, Romans 12:4 – 5).
- A Christian couple is described as “one flesh.”
 - Ephesians 5:31 quoting Genesis 2:24
 - Having multiple “one flesh” relationships is taught against (1 Corinthians 6:15 – 17).
- Elders and deacons are described as “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:12 and Titus 1:6). However, a better translation is “a one-woman man.”
- God allowed polygamy in the Old Testament
 - Kings were not to multiply wives (Deuteronomy 17:17), implying that God expected both kings and polygamy to happen, although He clearly did not want kings, so probably not polygamy either.
 - A man taking a second wife could not reduce the first wife’s allotment (Exodus 21:10, Deuteronomy 21:15 – 17), which implies that polygamy was expected to happen.
 - God gave David Saul’s wives (2 Samuel 12:8), although David may have merely had custody of them.
 - David had eight wives, including Abishag. Solomon had 700, plus 300 concubines. God did not object.
 - However, the purpose of marriage in the Old Testament was not to model the relationship of Christ and His church.
 - The ancient rabbis agreed that the Song of Solomon was the turning point in Israelite history from polygamy to monogamy.
- Polygamy is not mentioned in the New Testament.
- The Roman Empire legislated monogamy after Christian influence had become significant (about three centuries after the church began). Greeks tended toward monogamy, but tolerated polygamy. Many of the smaller cultures within those dominant ones practiced polygamy, generally those who were agrarian with a high male-mortality rate.
- In many countries polygamy is legal. What should congregations do when polygamous families become Christians?
- In countries where polygamy is legal, is it permissible for Christians to have multiple spouses at the same time?