

Christian Marriage

Understand the purpose of Christian marriage including the main features of the marriage ceremony.

Key Term

- **Faithfulness** - staying with your marriage partner and having sex only with them.

The meaning of Christian Marriage

Genesis 1:27-28 → 'Be fruitful and increase in number'.

Genesis 2:24 → 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh'.

The Purpose of Marriage

For Christians, marriage is an important part of God's plan. They believe that it is God's intention that:-

- A man and woman should fall in love and live permanently and faithfully together as husband and wife;
- As a result and expression of their love, they have sexual intercourse;
- Children are born and nurtured in a loving family environment.

The Anglican Approach to Marriage

- It is God's purpose that a husband and wife give themselves to each other in love throughout their lives.
- Marriage is given that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together.
- It is given that they may have children and bring them up in accordance with God's will.

The Roman Catholic Approach to Marriage

Roman Catholics view marriage as a Sacrament. The ceremony takes place in the presence of God. This sacrament invites God into the relationship between husband and wife – He is present as they exchange their vows and will remain with them throughout their life together, helping them and strengthening their love for each other.

Promises made by the couple are to each other in front of God.

Marriage is a total commitment (permanent) between two people (exclusive) for the rest of their lives (life-long).

Christians believe that this is the ideal of marriage and the ideal environment in which to bring up children.

Other Approaches to Marriage

- Other Christians would add that marriage is a legal contract that protects the rights of each partner and any children born to them.

The marriage ceremony

There are a number of important points in a Christian marriage ceremony.

- The ceremony takes place in a church in the presence of God who is part of the marriage.
- The bride and groom make vows of life-long commitment to each other, with God as their witness;
- The Bible readings and sermon are about the meaning of marriage;
- Rings are exchanged;
- Prayers are said for the couple and they are blessed;
- The marriage register is signed by the couple and witnessed by family and friends, (making the marriage legal).

The Vows

In every Christian marriage ceremony, the bride and groom make vows (solemn promises to each other).

This is the point at which the couple become married.

You must know the vows and what they mean!!

The vows represent a serious commitment to each other. They promise in front of God, their family and friends to stay together and stand by each other whatever happens.

For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Till death do us part.

Meaning of the Vows

VOW

1. I (name), take you (name) to be my husband/wife.
2. To have and to hold from this day forward.
3. For better, for worse.
4. For richer, for poorer.

MEANING

1. The marriage will be legal in the eyes of your country.
2. From today the couple are together.
3. The couple will stay together during bad times as well as the good.
4. When money is tight they still find fun.

VOW

5. In sickness and in health

6. To love and to cherish.

7. Til death do us part

8. According to God's holy law, and in the presence of God I make this VOW.

MEANING

5. Illness is no excuse to end a marriage. You should be there for each other.

6. Both partners love each other, care for each other and respect each other.

7. Marriage is for life.

8. God's law in the Bible says all this; you are making lasting serious vows.

Symbolism of Rings

After the vows have been made, the couple will exchange rings. The ring symbolises two things:-

- as a ring is a circle with no beginning or end, it is a sign of their never ending love and faithfulness (fidelity) to each other;
- it is a visible sign of the promises they have made to each other.



Past Questions

- 1b) Explain two different Christian attitudes to the purpose of marriage? Use at least two Bible passages in your explanation. (6)
- 2b) Outline the main features of a Christian marriage ceremony. (6)
- 3c) Explain how Christian marriage vows help a couple to live their married life. (8)

Christian Attitudes to the Break Up of a Marriage

To understand differences among Christians in their attitudes to divorce, annulment and re-marriage and the reasons for these attitudes.

Key Terms

- **Annulment** - a declaration by the Church that a marriage never lawfully existed
- **Re-marriage** - marrying again after being divorced from a previous marriage

When Marriages Break Down

There are counselling groups available to couples who feel they need help to resolve their marital difficulties;-

- **Relate** – a non-Christian organisation which offers counselling on relationship education, sex therapy and support for couples and their families;
- **Marriage Care** – a Roman Catholic organisation which specializes in working with couples who are experiencing marital problems. They also help young people to prepare for marriage.

BUT – what if the problems can't be resolved. Some Christian traditions differ in their opinion of divorce.

Christianity and Divorce

- Jesus said:
 - Man must not separate what God has joined together.
 - A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife.
 - I tell you then that any man who divorces his wife for any other cause than her unfaithfulness, commits adultery if he marries some other woman.

The Roman Catholic Church and Divorce

The **Roman Catholic Church** does not accept divorce in any form. The vows are sacred promises made in front of God, who joins the couple together. To divorce is to reject God's plan and break this promise.

Those who obtain a divorce are still considered to be married in the eyes of God.

They cannot remarry in the Roman Catholic Church while their ex-partner is still alive. To do so is **adultery**.

If a marriage has broken down, the couple can live apart but they must remain **celibate**.

Roman Catholic Annulment

In some cases Roman Catholics are permitted to have an annulment. This means a marriage is invalid and never truly existed.

Annulments are granted to those who can prove that something prevented a real marriage from taking place.

Each case is considered carefully by a marriage tribunal and is often a lengthy business.

Those whose marriages are annulled are free to marry someone else in church. (This is not considered to be a remarriage).

Annulment is not recognised by the government, so a civil divorce is necessary as well.

Roman Catholic Annulment

Reasons for an annulment include:-

- the marriage has not been consummated (one partner has refused to have sex);
- the marriage was not made freely (an arranged marriage);
- one of the partners did not have a full understanding of what they were doing (they were not of sound mind);
- the marriage was not lawful (one of the partners was underage or already married).

The Church of England and Divorce

Although the Anglican Church is against divorce and believes that married people should try to follow the teachings of Jesus concerning marriage, it understands that sometimes the vows cannot be kept for life.

Priests can marry a divorced couple if they feel the reasons for the divorce justify it. Permission must be given by the Bishop.

Orthodox and Liberal View

- Some Orthodox Christians and Liberal Protestants will permit divorce if it is the lesser of two evils, but it is strongly discouraged.
- They agree that in some cases, more hurt could be caused to the family (including children) if a failed marriage is forced to continue.
- Jesus taught his followers that love was the most important thing, permitting divorce might be the most loving thing to do in some cases.

Re-marriage

- The **Roman Catholic Church** does not permit divorce and so it cannot consider re-marriage for divorcees.
- If a person has lost their spouse through death, then re-marriage in the Catholic Church is permitted.
- The **Baptist Union** and the **Church of England**, permit re-marriage in church because they believe God will forgive sins and allow people to make a fresh start.

Past Questions

- 4b) Outline different attitudes among Christians to divorce. (6)
- 5c) Explain why the Roman Catholic Church is against divorce. You should use the Bible to support your explanation. (8)

Past Questions

- 6c) Explain why there are different attitudes among Christians to remarriage after divorce. (8)
- 7d) "Christians should be encouraging marriage and family life instead of accepting quick divorces and the remarriage of divorced couples".
Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view. You should refer to Christianity in your answer. (4)