

# Theme A: Relationships and Families

What could I be asked about in the exam?

✓ **You must be able to explain contrasting beliefs on the following three issues with reference to different Christian ideas:**

- Contraception.
- Sexual relationships before marriage.
- Homosexual relationships

Sex Marriage and Divorce:

✓ **Human sexuality including:**

- heterosexual and homosexual relationships
- Sexual relationships before and outside of marriage.
- Contraception and family planning.
- The nature and purpose of marriage.
- Same-sex marriage and cohabitation.
- Divorce, including reasons for divorce, and remarrying.
- Ethical arguments related to divorce, including those based on the sanctity of marriage vows and compassion

✓ **Families and Gender Equality**

✓ **The nature of families, including:**

- the role of parents and children
- extended families and the nuclear family.

✓ **The purpose of families, including:**

- procreation
- stability and the protection of children
- educating children in a faith.

✓ **Contemporary family issues including:**

- same-sex parents
- polygamy.
- The roles of men and women.
  - ✓ **Gender equality.**
  - ✓ **Gender prejudice and discrimination, including examples.**

## **Is homosexuality acceptable?**

A homosexual relationship is a relationship between two people of the same sex - 2 men or 2 women. Some Christians are against homosexuality as they believe that God made Adam and Eve to show that a relationship should be between a man and a woman. However, others believe that we should celebrate all forms of love and that God made some people heterosexual (attracted to members of the opposite sex) and some homosexual (attracted to members of the same sex) - they should all be respected and allowed to love a happy life without judgement.

## **Roman Catholic view of homosexuality**

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." (Leviticus 20:13).

Roman Catholics feel that homosexual sex is wrong as it cannot result in new life being created (which is the only purpose of sex). Homosexuals should be treated with respect and compassion and should not be discriminated against, but they should not act upon their sexual impulses.

Marriage is a sacrament and a man and a woman are the essential elements of that sacrament. As the purpose of marriage is to raise children in a family, gay marriage is not supported. The Orthodox Christian view is very similar to the Catholic view in that whilst having homosexual feelings is not itself a sin, these feelings should not be acted upon.

## **Contrasting Quaker Christian view of homosexuality**

Quaker Christians fully support gay marriage and homosexuality. Quakers argue that God supports any love of mutual respect, commitment and selflessness. They argue that God has provided all with their nature and so it is wrong to reject a person because of this nature. If they are gay, God has made them this way, God loves them this way and they should be free to live a life which makes them happy. In 2009, Quaker churches began allowing same-sex couples to marry in their churches. These marriages were only recognised as legal marriages when UK law changed in 2013. Quakers argue that the message of Jesus was that we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28) and so all people should be treated equally, regardless of their sexuality.

# Cohabitation and sex outside of marriage

## Key words:

**Cohabit** - a couple who live together before they are married are 'cohabiting'

**Chastity** - not having sex until you are married

**Adultery** - Being married to someone and having sex with someone else

## Christian views:

### Sex before marriage

*"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." (1 Corinthians 7: 8-9)*

Most Christians believe that sex should only occur within a marriage. Sex is a gift from God that should only be enjoyed within a committed marriage. Roman Catholic Christians stress the importance of waiting until marriage before having sex. They feel that every sexual act should result in the possibility of a baby (as this is the sole purpose of sex) and children should only be born once a couple are married - therefore sex before marriage is wrong.

However, other Christians, such as Quaker Christians, argue that sex before marriage is acceptable if the couple love one another and are committed to each other. If sex is an expression of love within a strong relationship, then the couple do not have to be married before they have sex. Weddings are often very expensive and so it might be practical for the couple to have a sexual relationship and cohabit before they get married to give them time to save up their money.

### Cohabitation

In today's world, many people live together before getting married. However, many Christians, including Roman Catholic Christians, are against cohabitation as they feel that a couple should only live together and have sex once they are married. This is because the sole purpose of marriage, living together and having sex is for the raising of children. Only when a couple have made their vows before God should they live together.

However, in practice, many modern Christians do live together before they get married. They feel that they want to make sure that they are compatible with each other before they get married. Given the increasing cost of weddings, they may want to save up for their wedding whilst living together and sharing bills.

## Adultery

*"Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."* (Hebrews 13: 4)

Adultery breaks the sacred bond between a husband and a wife by going against the vows which were made before God. The Ten Commandments tell Christians that sex outside of marriage is wrong, 'thou shalt not commit adultery' and St Paul tells Christians that even looking lustfully at another person when you are marriage is sinful and like committing to adultery.

All Christians believe that adultery is wrong. However, their definition of adultery may differ. Jesus taught that a person who remarries after divorce and has sex with another person is committing adultery (as the first marriage can never be broken). Therefore, Roman Catholics believe that remarriage results in adultery, whereas the Church of England do allow remarriage and do not regard it as involving adultery.



### Marriage

#### Bible quotes:

- *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* (Matthew 19: 5-6)
- *"Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband."* (1 Corinthians 7: 8-10)
- *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* (Exodus 20: 14)

For most Christians, marriage is a **sacrament** - a service in which God is involved. They believe that God blesses the union between the man and the woman and provides a secure foundation upon which they can build a family. Most Christians feel that a **nuclear family**, a family with a married mother and father with children, is the most secure and effective type of family.

In the marriage ceremony, vows are exchanged. Although there are some slight differences in the vows of different Christian denominations, they follow a fairly similar structure:

"I, \_\_\_\_, take thee, \_\_\_\_, to be my wedded husband/wife,  
to have and to hold, from this day forward,  
for better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself to  
you."

#### Important symbols in the marriage service:

**The exchanging of rings blessed by the priest** - are symbols of eternal love and a sign that the marriage should last forever and the vows should never be broken

**The white dress** - a sign of purity that the couple have waited until marriage to have sex

**The presence of family, friends and the community** - those who will help to keep the couple together during difficult times are part of the ceremony

Quaker Christians are an example of a Christian denomination which is **non-sacramental**. This means that they do not believe that God is any more present in the wedding ceremony than he is at any other time. Quakers believe that God is always with us, not only during special ceremonies. The marriage ceremony is a time to celebrate a couple's love before God and thank God for the gift of love. As with other Quaker services, members of the congregation are welcome to participate if they feel inspired, by speaking, reading Bible passages and or singing songs. This makes a Quaker wedding different to more formal wedding services such as those seen in the Roman Catholic Church.



Divorce is the legal severing of a marriage. According to UK law, there are 5 reasons why a person may file for divorce:

1. Adultery
2. Unreasonable behaviour
3. Desertion (left you for more than 2 years in a period of 2.5 years)
4. You have been separated for 3 years and you both agree to the divorce
5. You have been separated for 5 years even if one person does not agree to the divorce.

**Remarriage - Getting married again to someone else after divorce**

## Church of England

### Divorce

All Christians feel that people who have married have made a promise in front of God to stay together, love and support each other no matter what. Therefore, Church of England Christians feel that a married couple should try everything they can do stay together - counselling such as RELATE, discussing problems with family, friends, the vicar and other members of the religious community. They worry about the effect of divorce on children and the extended family. However, they do accept that sometimes people will get divorced and would not want someone to stay in a marriage that was making them feel desperately unhappy, especially if one member of the marriage had become abusive. Therefore, the Church of England does allow and recognise divorce.

### Remarriage

Sometimes, a person who has been divorced in the past may wish to marry someone else in the church. Whether or not a vicar will allow this in their church is different in different churches. Whilst many vicars do not perform marriage ceremonies for people who have previously been divorced as they have previously broken marriage vows made in front of God, some vicars do allow a remarriage, particularly if the person who has been divorced was abused, cheated on or abandoned by their previous husband/wife.

## Roman Catholic Church

### Divorce

Roman Catholics do not accept divorce. In the Bible, Jesus is very clear that divorce (and remarriage) is forbidden:

*“But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32)*

In addition, the marriage vows very clearly state that the couple must stay together through good times and bad times. Roman Catholics believe that marriage is a sacrament - it is a very special union between a man and a woman which is blessed by God himself. Therefore, the marriage cannot be dissolved. A couple who are recognised as divorced by the law will not be recognised as divorced by the church. As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, the couple remain married until one of them dies.

Due to this, Roman Catholics who do wish to end a marriage will often seek an annulment. An annulment which dissolves the marriage involves arguing that the marriage was now lawful in the first place and thus can be considered to have never taken place. An annulment can only be granted by the Pope and an example of a reason to grant an annulment is if it can be shown that one of the people in the 'marriage' did not enter freely into the marriage but was forced or deceived.

### Remarriage

As divorce is not recognised, remarriage is not allowed in the Roman Catholic Church. For Roman Catholics, a person who remarries and has sex with a new partner is committing adultery, as the first marriage is still binding in the eyes of the church. Roman Catholics who do divorce and remarry will remarry in a registry office, but the new marriage will not be recognised by the church.



**Contraception** - a method of preventing pregnancy. Examples include condoms, the pill, coil, patch, implant etc.

**Artificial contraception** - putting a barrier in place to prevent semen entering a woman (condom) or changing a woman's hormones to prevent her from getting pregnant (pill, coil, patch).

**Natural contraception** - Withdrawing the penis before ejaculation (withdrawal method) or working out times during which a woman is infertile and only having sex during these times (rhythm method).

Roman Catholic Christians are completely against all forms of artificial contraception. They believe strongly in the Sanctity of Life which is the idea that only God decides when life begins and ends. They believe that sex should only occur in marriage and as the purpose of sex is **procreation** (to create new life), every sexual act should end in the possibility of new life being created. God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" and so Christians should only have sex in order to reproduce. Roman Catholics point to the story of Onan from *Genesis* who was killed by God for "spilling his seed" - all semen should enter the woman during sex and it should do so with the hope of a baby being conceived. The only form of 'contraception' Roman Catholics allow is the rhythm method as it is still likely that a woman will become pregnant using this method.

Most other Christians do allow, or even encourage, married couples to use contraception. The Church of England, for example, argues that all children have the

right to be born into a family that wants them, can afford them and has enough time and energy for them. They argue that God wants everyone to be happy and sex should be enjoyed in a marriage as a way for a couple to be intimate with each other, demonstrate their love and strengthen their bond. This means that sex is not just for having children and so contraception is a positive thing as it prevents unwanted pregnancies.

Although most Christians feel that sex should only occur within marriage, many do accept that this is not always the case. Contraception is therefore encouraged to prevent babies being born before a couple are settled enough to care for them. Condoms also allow people to have sex without risking the spread of sexually transmitted infections and many argue that they should be encouraged as God would not want people to risk causing themselves or others any harm.

## Different types of family

Contemporary society contains within it many different types of families - much more so than in the past. Whilst many Christians believe that the nuclear family is the best one in which to raise children, other Christians believe that as long as children are loved and supported, different family types can be just as good, if not better, than nuclear families. All Christians believe that the family is extremely important in teaching young people how to love and serve God and be a good Christian.

## Nuclear family



A nuclear family consist of mother, father and children. This is the ideal family for Christians who feel that children should be raised by both a mother and a father who bring the children up to love God and treat each other, and others, with respect. *"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord."* (Colossians 3:18-21). The Bible tells Christian men to "leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife" (Genesis 2: 24) implying that families should live apart from grandparents.

# Extended Family

Some families live together in large groups, with aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents all living in the same house. Followers of religions such as Islam feel that they have a duty to look after their parents in their old age and so have them live with them. In the Qur'an, Muslims are commanded to *"be kind to your parents. If one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, 'My Lord, have mercy on them, since they cared for me when I was small'"* (Surah 17:23-24)



# Single-Parent Family



Many families in the UK consist of a single parent raising children after divorce or separation. Roman Catholic Christianity teaches that a couple who have made vows in front of God to stay together and bring up children together should never separate. They feel that divorce has a negative effect on children and that they should not be brought up by a single parent unless one of the parents dies. The Bible teaches that children need both parents, *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck."* (Proverbs 1:8-9)

# Same-Sex Couple Family

In 2002, the law changes to allow unmarried couples, including homosexual couples to adopt children. In addition to adoption, homosexual couples can have children through IVF or a surrogate mother. Members of the Church of England have mixed views on this issue, but members of the Roman Catholic Church are opposed as they feel that children need both a mother and a father (they also oppose IVF and surrogacy). The Bible ideal of a family is of a married man and woman having children naturally, *"and God blessed [Adam and Eve]. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it'"* (Genesis 1:28) and so Roman Catholics are against adoption of children by gay couples.





## Is there equality between men and women in Christianity?

### **Yes, there is gender equality between men and women in Christianity**

- Jesus said *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3: 28). This shows that he wanted men and women to be treated the same.
- *"For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God."* (1 Corinthians 11: 12). St Paul was here arguing that men and women depend upon each other and neither is more important than the other.
- In 1993, the Church of England allowed women to be ordained as priests. In 2015, they were also allowed to become bishops. Many other Christian denominations also allow women to lead services and be fully involved with the church showing that Christianity has changed to allow gender equality between men and women.

### **No, there is not gender equality between men and women**

- The Roman Catholic Church still does not allow female priests. It argues that Jesus can only be represented by another man and uses St Paul's teaching that women should be quiet in the church and never teach to justify its position: *"I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."* (1 Timothy 2: 22)
- Many Christians still feel that the man should be the head of the household and see looking after children and the house to be a woman's job. This view is justified by the Bible - *"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."* (Colossians 3: 18)
- There is still gender inequality in our society and Christians do not do enough to change this. For example, a big gender gap in pay has recently been highlighted and Christians have done nothing to challenge this.

### Possible exam questions:

- Give two religious beliefs about the nature of the family [2]
- Give two religious beliefs about the use of contraception. [2]
  
- Explain two contrasting religious beliefs about same-sex parents. In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. [4]
- Explain two contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about the use of artificial contraception within marriage. In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions.[4]

- Explain two religious beliefs about sexual relationships outside of marriage (adultery). Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. [5]
- Explain two religious beliefs about the role of parents in a religious family. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. [5]

'Men and women should not have equal rights.'

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion. [12]

'Divorce is never right.'

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments in support of this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion. [12]