

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE MADE A BIG MISTAKE

by Reggie Thomas

A lady wrote us that she was a Christian but made a horrible mistake. She married a Muslim who already had one wife. Now this second wife realizes her sin. She wishes to separate from the husband who had committed polygamy. Four preachers have advised this woman she must continue to live in a multiple marriage and abide by her husband's wishes. He wishes her to be a Muslim.

our answer:

This is a very tangled and difficult problem. There is no easy answer. The Word of God does address this problem -- and it is, indeed, a challenging one. I can tell from the counsel given to this sister that some of her teachers/pastors that she has consulted in the Philippines do not have a grasp of the truth themselves. Really I can't imagine a true Minister of the Gospel giving this lady the advice that those 4 gave her in the Philippines.

Here are some foundation points for addressing the situation.

1. When God says the "two" become "one flesh," He means precisely that: "two" (not three, four, etc) become "one flesh." In His reasoning on this subject, Jesus consistently viewed marriage as "two," and never any more (Matt 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-7). Apostolic doctrine also postulates one "wife," and never refers to "wives" -- 1 Cor 7:2; Eph 5:23,28,31,33; 1 Pet 3:7).
2. In marriage we have a type of Christ and the church (Eph 5:23-31). The church is Christ's "bride," not one of many brides (John 3:29; Rev 21:2,9; 22:17). Jesus has only one church, not many. Condoning multiple wives distorts that image, and is thus a sin against Christ.
3. A Christian wife is not to yield to the demands of an unbelieving husband in matters that defile her conscience or interrupt her relation to Christ -- even if she is the ONLY wife of the man. That is the point of 1 Corinthians 7:13-15. In that scenario, there is only one husband and one wife. It would loosely fit the circumstance of this sister only if her husband put away his other wife or wives -- which is another complicating factor. But in either case, she is not to yield to his unchristian demands.
4. A person who is "in Christ" never has the option of returning to their former religion or manners. That is tantamount to forsaking Christ.
5. Strictly speaking, "divorce" applies only to a one-husband-one-wife situation. Every place it is mentioned, "man" and "wife" are in the singular (Matt 5:31-32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Lk 16:18; 1 Cor 7:11). In other words, God never in any way dignifies a polygamous relationship.
6. The Holy Spirit never speaks of "marriage" within the context of multiple spouses
7. In all of the New Testament Scriptures, there is not a single example of polygamy, nor is it ever

recognized in any way as being valuable, practiced at the time, or in any way tolerable. This is particularly significant in view of the many references to multiple wives in the Old Covenant Scriptures. However, those ancient practices were the result of lesser light and the hardness of human hearts. Lamech was the first man to have "two wives," and the Spirit makes a special note of it (Gen 4:19). He also was a murderer, and not a suitable example for anyone.

The significance of the above is simply this: It is not proper to take Scriptural instructions concerning marriage and apply them to those involved in polygamy. Such a matter must be addressed in another way, for the Spirit consistently postulates one wife and one husband. When God was joined to Israel, she was His only wife. Jesus is joined to His church, and that is His only wife. Those situations forbid us to think of marriage in any other way, for a servant is not greater than his master John 13:16.

A most salient point is made on this subject in McClintok and Strong's Cyclopaedia of the Bible. "The mind of the divine Legislator was so clearly and ineffaceably stamped on his followers that the usage (polygamy) in early and later ages of the Church was utterly unknown; there is no instance on record of a baptized polygamist for fifteen hundred years after Christ."

#### THE NEW COVENANT APPROACH

The New Covenant approach to this subject is not, "Is it wrong?" That is an Old Covenant approach. In Christ, the issue is, "Is it RIGHT?" Rather than searching for some word from God that condemns the practice, the child of God is to look for some word that encourages it. That is involved in doing whatever we do "in word or in deed in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col 3:17). Further, whatever is done must be done "heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Col 3:23). Everything is to be done "to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

With this mind, the questions are: (1) Will this relationship bring glory to God? (2) Can I do this for God? (3) Can I give thanks to God for this? (4) Can I do this heartily, as unto the Lord? (5) Will this grieve the Holy Spirit or please Him? (6) Will this bring me closer to the Lord or push me further from Him? (7) Will this defile my conscience, or will I maintain peace with God? (8) Can I displease God to please a husband (even in the context of a God-ordained marriage of one woman and one man). In her heart, this woman will know the answer to every one of these questions.

She **MUST** follow her conscience, for the Lord makes no provision to violate it. The revealed objective is to keep a "pure conscience" (1 Tim 3:9) and a "good conscience" (1 Tim 1:5). It is her conscience -- a Spirit-trained conscience -- that is causing her difficulty. She is being asked to do something that violates her conscience, and she must not do it.

#### BREAKING A FAMILY

The lady's professed husband asked her if her religion taught her to "break a family." There is an answer to that question. Breaking the family is not the objective of any person in Jesus. However, Jesus did say these words, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). He also said, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Mat 19:29). It is possible for a person's "foes" to become those of their own house (Matt 10:36).

The family, however sacred it may appear, is second to God. It is never allowed to upstage the Lord -- never. Further, there are circumstances when following Jesus causes a disruption in the family.

#### IS THE MARRIAGE LEGAL?

The sister mentioned that some pastors told her since the marriage was administered by a judge, it was legal, and thus honored by God. This is not true. Does that include the marriage of sodomites? May the Lord deliver us from such pastors. I suppose the marriage of Herod was legal from his point of view, but John the Baptist told him, "It is NOT lawful for you to have her" (Matt 14:4). The government also condoned the oppression of Israel, but God told Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" It also condoned throwing Daniel in the lion's den, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace of fire. The laws of men are never accepted by God when they contradict His character or His law. God honors "government officials" ONLY when they are carrying out His will. That is one of the points of Romans 13.

When Jesus commented on marriage, He said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mat 19:6). He did not say "What the government has joined together."

#### WHAT SHOULD SHE DO?

This dear lady has no obligation to anyone who seeks to drive a wedge between her and the Lord. It is not possible for her to be right in doing something that dishonors God and violates what He has said about marriage --= or anything else. This is a case where she is being called by God to "forsake" a relationship that interferes with her quest to please Him. Jesus declared a blessing would be given to those who forsook otherwise legitimate relationships for His name's. Those technically legitimate relationships included a household, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, and children (Matt 19:29). You may be sure that they also include unlawful associations, such as a polygamous relationship.

The Lord will help her do what is right He will strengthen her to make a God-honoring decision, and to carry it out. He is also able to subdue the man who calls himself her husband. If the mighty God of heaven can turn a king's heart to do whatever He wants (Prov 21:1), He is surely able to deal effectively with this man. The relationship is wrong, and must not be continued.