

The renowned scholar Gordon J Wenham has observed

*“Readers of Genesis will quickly come across a variety of episodes that seem to be marked by irregular sexual behavior. I say ‘seem to be irregular’; because what we really need to establish is whether these actions contravene biblical law on the one hand or the ethics of the narrator on the other. We must Endeavour to avoid reading into the text our own prejudices, and let it speak for itself.”*

## The Morals and Ethics of Genesis

In this section we will look briefly at how the narrator portrays adultery, polygyny and homosexual practice in Genesis. Many teachers believe you cannot approach Genesis as an ethical guide but this is born out of a discrepancy in their values and the values presented in Genesis. Those who would like to dismiss the ethical value of Genesis have to clearly ignore the fact that not only are the episodes presented to us in Genesis but God’s direct response is recorded as well. Point being, we can draw accurate moral and ethical conclusions based on God’s direct response. To avoid reading into the text we must let God’s response be ours as well whether we like it or not.

The first recorded occurrence of what scripture will later call adultery happens in Gen 12 when Pharaoh takes Sarai as a wife not knowing she was Abram’s wife. God was very displeased with this and makes it very clear to Pharaoh by smiting him and his house with plagues.

*“But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe diseases because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.”- (Gen 12:17)*

The author of the Genesis record informs his audience that God inflicted plagues because of this action with the intention of teaching his audience that sex with another man’s wife was a grave sin and brought severe judgment from God.

As we continue our journey through Genesis we come across this same situation in Gen 20 which the author has already established as grave sin. *“...So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her.”* The author once again makes clear God’s estimation of this behavior giving us two proofs of his displeasure. 1 God himself informs Abimelech of his sin (20:3 *But God appeared to Abimelech in a dream at night and said to him, “**You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken, for she is someone else’s wife.**”*) and 2 God struck them with infertility, (20:17 *Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, as well as his wife and female slaves so that they were able to have children. 20:18 **For the Lord had caused infertility to strike every woman in the household of Abimelech because he took Sarah, Abraham’s wife.***)

The author provides consistency in his repetition of this situation twice more in Genesis. Gen [26:10](#) *Then Abimelech exclaimed, “What in the world have you done to us? One of the men might easily have had sexual relations with your wife, and you would have brought guilt on us!”* and Joseph declares it a great sin when propositioned by his master’s wife, [39:9](#) *There is no one greater in this household than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. So how could I do such a great evil and sin against God?”*

The next situation to be visited in the Genesis record is homosexuality in Genesis 19

19:4 *“Before they could lie down to sleep, all the men – both young and old, from every part of the city*

*of Sodom – surrounded the house. 19:5 They shouted to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!” 19:6 Lot went outside to them, shutting the door behind him. 19:7 He said, “No, my brothers! Don’t act so wickedly! 19:8 Look, I have two daughters who have never had sexual relations with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do to them whatever you please. Only don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”*

Many today try to stress that violence was God’s real problem with Sodom and Gomorrah and indeed it was, but the context stresses the homosexuality of these cities as well and that it is displeasing to God. The author is penning this to clearly inform the audience of the wickedness of this form of relationship. God’s response leaves no question concerning his sentiments toward this activity. 19:13 *“because we are about to destroy it. The outcry against this place is so great before the Lord that he has sent us to destroy it.”*

*19:27 Abraham got up early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 19:28 He looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of that region. As he did so, he saw the smoke rising up from the land like smoke from a furnace.*

### **Polygamy**

In the next episode we see Abraham take another wife in addition to Sarai named Hagar (Gen 16), and strangely no judgment follows the action, but rather acceptance and blessing.

*16:1 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not given birth to any children, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. 16:2 So Sarai said to Abram, “Since the Lord has prevented me from having children, have sexual relations with my servant. Perhaps I can have a family by her.” Abram did what Sarai told him. 16:3 So after Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Sarai, Abram’s wife, gave Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to her husband to be his wife. 16:4 He had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. Once Hagar realized she was pregnant, she despised Sarai. 16:5 Then Sarai said to Abram, “You have brought this wrong on me! I allowed my servant to have sexual relations with you, but when she realized that she was pregnant, she despised me. May the Lord judge between you and me!” 16:6 Abram said to Sarai, “Since your servant is under your authority, do to her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai treated Hagar harshly, so she ran away from Sarai. 16:7 The Lord’s angel found Hagar near a spring of water in the desert – the spring that is along the road to Shur. 16:8 He said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” She replied, “I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai.” 16:9 Then the Lord’s angel said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her authority. 16:10 I will greatly multiply your descendants,” the Lord’s angel added, “so that they will be too numerous to count.”*

We can see a sharp contrast in God’s response to this situation from the previous one of Sarai and Pharaoh. God commanded Pharaoh to abandon the relationship and return Sarai to Abraham, but when Hagar tried to abandon this relationship he commanded her to return and honor it. This is a strong indication of acceptance and this relationship remained intact for 20 yrs. The contrast becomes even more apparent in God’s response when he promises fruitfulness, moving from acceptance to blessing.

In the understanding of the audience the promise of abundant seed is directly tied to Divine blessing.

To Adam and Eve in the beginning Gen 1:28 *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply...”* God assures Abraham that he will experience this blessing if he will abandon all and follow YHWH in Gen 12 and 22 he promises this to Hagar here in 16 and to Sarah as well. The idea of children being a sign of divine blessing from God continues through scripture the Psalmist says: *Yes, sons are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.* - Ps127:3 The mentioning of God directly blessing these men and their wives with offspring is a direct stamp of approval and serves as a contrast to God smiting Pharaoh and Ambimelech along with their wives with infertility as divine judgment.

Once again we are faced with this contrast concerning God’s evaluation of and response to polygyny as we come to Gen 29, 30. The situation God responds to is Jacob and his four wives (Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilah). In this relationship we do not see God announce any displeasure for Jacob’s polygyny at all. The author does not leave it to silence for us to deduce God’s estimation of this relationship though. God blesses Jacob and all his wives with seed and provides for us the source of their fertility. *“...The Lord has looked...Because the Lord heard....I will praise the Lord...God has vindicated me...God paid attention...God has granted me a reward...God has given me a good gift... God took note of Rachel He paid attention to her and enabled her to become pregnant....* The author expressly declares God’s involvement and insists that this family although not perfect is in fact blessed and honored by God.

Also there is no judgment or displeasure expressed concerning Esau’s polygyny only that he married pagan women Gen 26:34 *When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, as well as Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. 26:35 They caused Isaac and Rebekah great anxiety.* We can see Abraham bind his servant in covenant that he would not find his son a wife from among the Canaanites (Gen 24:3) and Rebekah expresses severe anguish over the thought that Jacob might marry one (Gen 27:46), even to the point that she would rather die than to live and see that.

The disobedience Esau tries to rectify is not having multiple wives but marrying pagan women, 28:6 *Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan Aram to find a wife there. As he blessed him, Isaac commanded him, “You must not marry a Canaanite woman.” 28:7 Jacob obeyed his father and mother and left for Paddan Aram. 28:8 Then Esau realized that the Canaanite women were displeasing to his father Isaac. 28:9 So Esau went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Abraham’s son Ishmael, along with the wives he already had.*

### **Concluding the Genesis Record**

So far, we can see God was not timid at all concerning his response to immorality. As seen in the Genesis account sex with another man's wife and homosexuality is definitely on the destruction list in Genesis. Why aren't they taught that a man having multiple wives is wrong? We do not see God respond with his righteous judgment concerning men marrying multiple women nor do we hear a whisper expressing his displeasure. No plagues or curses of any kind to suggest to any reader God was displeased with polygyny. Instead we see God actively blessing families made of one man and multiple women. God himself acknowledges each lady in these polygynous homes as legitimate wives. We see him bless them with fruitfulness and he refers to them as wives with his own words. There is a strong contrast in his response to a man taking another man’s wife and a man marrying multiple women. The honest truth is God accepted polygyny according to the Genesis record and for one to assert the contrary would be an assertion with no support from the text. Any baseless assertion would be imposed personal prejudice ignoring completely the details, precisely what Dr Wenham warns us about and

sadly does himself.

According to Genesis if men lay with other men as they do with women this was immoral and brought judgment (Gen 19). If a man had sexual relations with another man's wife it was adultery, if a woman had sexual relations with a man other than her husband it was adultery (Gen 12, 20, 26, 39). When a man had sexual relations with an unmarried woman she became his lawful wife regardless of his marital status, and if a single woman laid with a man, single or married he became her husband ( [Gen 16, 29,30](#)). The ideas of marriage and morality as taught in Genesis are very challenging to a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, but we must allow the text to speak for itself without imposition from our culture.

### **Anti-arguments examined**

Any time we are faced with questions concerning the seeming approval of polygyny we fall back on a few prepackaged arguments. We have developed arguments that allow us to explain it away and ignore the facts but as Christians should we really feel such a need to escape the truth of the matter. If our current moral framework is simply built on western tradition should we exalt it to the level of God's moral frame work?

Of course some would say God tolerated polygyny but did not approve of it. This simply is not a good explanation for the facts of the text. As pointed out in this article when God disapproved of something he made it known. He struck Pharaoh and Abimelech with disease, infertility and certain death when taking another man's wife, even when they were genuinely ignorant of what they had done. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for homosexuality leveling the region to the ground, wiping out their entire civilization unto this day. Toleration is not in the lesson plan of the Genesis record.

Others will point out In Genesis 1 and 2 God created one man and one woman therefore that is his binding pattern for marriage. Often times this is called the Genesis account but that is precisely the problem, we fail to realize there is more than one account in Genesis, it is a record and we must survey it all to arrive at proper conclusions. We cannot take one account out of many and honestly say we have considered all the data.

At first the one man one woman scenario sounds like a well thought out argument but under scrutiny it is proven very weak, contradicting logic and hermeneutics (laws of sound interpretation). In agreement with Gordon Fee we must evaluate this according to sound logic *"The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the "plain meaning" of the text.... The most important ingredient one brings to that task is enlightened common senses."*

If we arrive at the conclusion of Genesis teaching 'monogamy only' it is because of a logical fallacy, one does not have to be a philosopher to see this problem; a little common sense will suffice. This would be arguing from a particular to a general, which is putting the cart before the horse. If we use this form of logic in interpreting the details of Genesis we develop many scenarios that none of us would dare say.

1. The first marriage was monogamous therefore all marriages must be monogamous.
2. The first child born was male therefore all first born children must be male.
3. The first man and woman were married therefore every man and woman must be married.

The first conclusion rules out Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Ezra, Gideon and most of the heroes of our faith, the second conclusion rules out many of us who's first born were daughters and the third conclusion rules out our Lord and the Apostle Paul. This upside down logic violates good common sense. We wouldn't dare claim 2 and 3 so why would we claim 1. If you reject argument 2 and 3 you

must reject 1. If you stand on argument 1 you must stand on 2 and 3 because they are built on the same logic. To appeal to argument 1 and reject 2 and 3 clearly puts one in the position of being inconsistent in his interpretation and imposing his preferences in on text.

The second problem with this explanation is proper Hermeneutics (laws of interpretation) will not allow this conclusion to be sound. As the three term President of Southeastern Baptist Seminary Dr Daniel Akin has said about the interpretative process of scripture *“Discover the author’s original intended meaning and honor that meaning. If the author says it then the bible says it. If you cannot say the author said it then you cannot say the bible said it.”* As well as Fee and Stuart *“A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers.”* Along with John Calvin in his preface to Romans *“It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”*

The authorship of Moses concerning the first five books of the Bible is not disputed among conservative scholarship and when interpreting Genesis one must take that into consideration. The biblical account informs us that Moses had two wives, Zipporah: Exodus 2:16-22, and Exodus 18:1-3 and the Ethiopian woman: Numbers 12:1-15. Zipporah was not the "Ethiopian woman" herself. Zipporah was of the tribe of Midian. Genesis 25:1-3 shows that Midian was one of the six sons born unto Abraham by his third wife, Keturah. Thus, Zipporah was "Abrahamic", who was "Shemitic" descended of Noah's son Shem, Genesis 10:1; 11:11-27. But the "Ethiopian woman" ("Cushite woman" in the Hebrew) descended of Cush, who was "Hamitic" (i.e., descended of Noah's son Ham, Genesis 10:1,6). Indeed, Zipporah, being of Noah's son, Shem, could not be the "Ethiopian woman" who was of Ham (Shem's brother). Therefore, the Shemitic/Abrahamic Midianitess Zipporah could not possibly be the Hamitic/non-Abrahamic "Ethiopian woman".

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus gives us the historical account also validating Moses having two concurrent wives (Ant 2:243-258)

1. The biblical genealogical record proves they are two distinct women. Being one descends from Shem and the other Ham it is impossible to be one and the same. If it is impossible for them to be the same race, naturally we would know it is impossible for them to be the same person.
2. The historical record also testifies of them being two distinct women because they are distinct in race, in timing of marriage, different fathers, ancestry and lots in life. One is an Ethiopian princess, the other a lowly shepherd girl of Media.

What does all this have to do with Adam and Eve? If anyone knew what the implications of the Genesis chapter 1 and 2 texts were it would have been the author, Moses. Moses had two wives and allowed those under his leadership to have more than one wife (Exodus 21:10, Deut 21:15-17). He obviously did not see monogamy implied in his own writing of the Genesis account. It seems that some teachers are finding implications that aren't there to justify our cultural preference rather than sticking with the author. To make this claim one would be departing from the author himself and if I have to choose between the preachers of culture or the author of divine truth then I will stick with the author. This alone in my opinion should cause us to reject the interpretation of Genesis chapter one and two as teaching monogamy only. So, the real issue the monogamy only interpretation has to deal with is not that it conflicts with my interpretation but that it conflicts with the inspired author's interpretation of his own writing. What is really sad is that in departing from the author they depart from their own rules of interpretation and conflict with themselves. The last point to be made is the audience didn't see the monogamy doctrine either, there is simply too many polygynous marriages in scripture to mention specifically in this article. Also arriving at 'monogamy only' assumes a lot into the text, can you say that because Adam started out with one woman that he remained that way for life. Who knows whether

he did or didn't it is irrelevant to the narrative.

The final appeal comes from a statement in Genesis 2:24, and the usual emphasis the term "one flesh" "not two or three flesh". This argument is made out of poor exegesis of the text and leads to ignorance of the concept of 'one flesh' as understood by the author and audience. The idea of Genesis teaching two halves making one whole is imposition of Greek ideology into the text. The two halves making one whole is the Greek version of true love, marriage and soulmate-ism according to Plato's Symposium but that is not what the Hebraic concept teaches.

### Exegesis Gen 2:22-24

2:22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

2:23 Then the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man."

2:24 That is why<sup>1</sup>  
a man leaves<sup>2</sup>

his father and mother and unites with his wife, and they become one flesh.<sup>3</sup>

2:25 The man and his wife were both naked, but they were not ashamed.

1) This statement, introduced by the Hebrew phrase עַל־כֵּן ('al-ken, "therefore" or "that is why"), is an editorial comment, not an extension of the quotation in vs 23. The statement is describing what typically happens, not what will or should happen. It is saying, "This is why we do things the way we do." This is an editorial comment by the narrator that links a contemporary audience and practice with the historical event being narrated. The historical event narrated in vs.22,23 provides the basis for the contemporary practice described in v. 24. That is why the imperfect verb forms are translated with the present tense rather than future.

2) Moses is explaining why we prioritize the marriage relationship and provides a contrast. The contrast is "Leaving father and mother" and "cleaving to his wife". The marriage relationship is to take precedence because it was the first relationship created, (not parent and child) and is God's intention for men and women. Jesus does not expound on the narrative but simply quotes Moses's exposition of the narrative and then reinforces it with a "therefore" statement, showing the same understanding and consistency with Moses (Matt 19:3-6). This will be dealt with later in this article.

3) The phrase "one flesh" occurs only here and must be interpreted in light of v. 23. There the man declares that the woman is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh". To be one's "bone and flesh" is to be related by blood to someone. For example, the phrase describes the relationship between Laban and Jacob (Gen 29:14); Abimelech and the Shechemites (Judg 9:2; his mother was a Shechemite); David and the Israelites (2 Sam 5:1); David and the elders of Judah (2 Sam 19:12); and David and his nephew Amasa (2 Sam 19:13, see 2 Sam 17:2; 1 Chr 2:16-17). The expression "one flesh" seems to indicate that they become, as it were, "kin," or "related". In this first marriage in human history, the woman was literally formed from the man's bone and flesh. Even though later marriages do not involve such a divine surgical operation, the first marriage sets the pattern for how later marriages are understood and explains why marriage supersedes the parent-child relationship "leave father and mother and cleave to his wife". The Hebraic understanding of marriage was that when you had sexual relations you became kin, "flesh of flesh and bone of bone" or "one flesh". We can see Solomon

addresses his bride as אַחֹתִי ('akhoti, "my sister, my bride") several times Song 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1. It is clear from Song 8:1 that the young man and his bride were not physical brother and sister but lovers. The New Testament Paul appeals to the same understanding 1Cor 9:5 referring to a "sister wife" (KJV) when justifying his and Barnabas's right to marry. Simply stated, 'one flesh' is another way of saying 'flesh of flesh and bone of bone' and means they become 'kin' or 'related'. It is evident that multiple wives would not diminish the relatedness of each other to one husband any more than brothers or sisters would diminish each other's relatedness to a common father. If allowing other passages to interpret this verse is not authoritative enough there are plenty of conservative scholars who arrive at the same conclusion, Gordon J Wenham, Chislom and Issacson to name a few.

## Morality in the Law

As we move into the explicit instruction of the Law the morality or immorality of certain activities should become clear if they have not yet. The first thing that will be examined is how the Law defined adultery. Contrary to a modern definition of adultery, (sexual activity of either spouse with someone other than their one spouse) in the Law adultery was limited to sexual intercourse between a man and another man's wife or betrothed woman. Similarly, any act of coition between a married woman and a man who was not her husband was also regarded as adultery (Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22-29). There is no Law requiring reciprocal monogamy of the man. Any attempt to find such will prove empty. All explicit instruction of the Law remains consistent with what we have already concluded with Genesis. This is not my conclusion alone, but the conclusion of many other respected evangelical scholars.

William Luke, a professor at the renowned Moody Bible Institute had this conclusion after studying adultery for his book on divorce and remarriage.

***It never crossed my mind, when I started my research on the book, that the Old Testament law allowed polygyny. Of course I knew that some people in ancient times practiced it, but I thought it was a sin, perhaps one that God winked at. My first clue that I was mistaken came when I attempted to define "adultery" from a Biblical perspective. I had no doubt in my mind that "adultery" would be defined as "any sexual relationship between a married person and someone other than their spouse." I could not even imagine another definition. So imagine my surprise when I sought, like a good little Evangelical fundamentalist, to find verses which "proved up" that (working) definition, and found instead that adultery was always defined by the woman's marital status, never the man's***

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*And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. Lev 20:10 (KJV)*

Notice the point, 'another man's wife' which is always the determining factor through the Genesis narrative and the Law.

*22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. 23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; 24 Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath*

*humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you. 25 But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: 26 But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter: 27 For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her. 28 If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; 29 Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.*  
Deut 22:22-29 (KJV)

Adultery was understood to be a man laying with another man's wife or espoused woman "*If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband...or...betrothed unto an husband...*" and required death "*...they shall both of them die...ye shall stone them ...that they both die.*" (22-27.) The flow of this text is very interesting; it gives special attention to the woman's marital status but never the man's.

In vs. 28-29 we see it once again qualify the woman's status but no mention of the man's. "*28 If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; 29 Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.* The law is very meticulous about the status of the woman but ignores completely the man's. It points out a virgin that is not betrothed but it never mentions whether the man is unbetroth, betrothed or married, it is simply any man whether married or not. When such an emphasis is stressed for one and completely ignored for the other that speaks loudly.

This text also rebuts the typical explanation of 'tolerance' to explain God's allowance of polygyny by God's declaration of zero tolerance twice, for activity he considered evil "*...so shalt thou put away evil from Israel...put away evil from among you...*". If he allowed a practice to continue in Israel then it was not evil. The problem arises when we assume western monogamy into the text but to any student of scripture it is evident that Israel was a polygamous society including many of our heroes because they lived by a law that was dictated by God himself. This section in Deuteronomy is clear, adultery is always determined by the woman's marital status and the man's is irrelevant.

## Polygyny

In contrast, a man was not considered an adulterer if he had two wives, nor was a woman considered an adulteress if she shared one husband according to God's Law. (Deut 21:15-17, Ex 21:10)

*15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: 16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: 17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.* Deut 21:15-17 (KJV)

The Law pertaining to the inheritance right addresses the possible scenario of a man having multiple



heirs through multiple wives. God does not call for execution; instead he demands that the man honor the inheritance laws regardless of his relationship with the children's mothers. The lack of execution commands rules out adultery or immorality of any kind (all immorality required death) and in light of God's declaration of zero tolerance for evil we cannot claim tolerance to explain God's acceptance of this situation. The only explanation for this is that it is perfectly within God's moral frame work.

The next Law pertains to a concubine; they were not common whores as some might think. She was considered a wife and the husband was responsible for her care even if he married another. The factors that distinguished the concubine were the dowry and inheritance right not the man's level of commitment to her, nor her to him. He was still expected to provide for her and her to be faithful to him.

Ex 21:7 *"If a man sells his daughter as a female servant, she will not go out as the male servants do. 21:8 If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to a foreign nation, because he has dealt deceitfully with her. 21:9 If he designated her for his son, then he will deal with her according to the customary rights of daughters. 21:10 If he takes another wife, he must not diminish the first one's food, her clothing, or her marital rights. 21:11 If he does not provide her with these three things, then she will go out free, without paying money.*

This law establishes God's rules for concubinage (non-endowed wife).

1. The man is responsible for her for life just as marriage to a free woman *"If a man sells his daughter as a female servant, she will not go out as the male servants do.*
2. If he does not complete the contract (sexual relations) he cannot sell her, but must allow her father to redeem her *"If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to a foreign nation, because he has dealt deceitfully with her."*
3. If he has secured her for his son he must treat her as a daughter (he has no right to enjoy her in any other way) *"If he designated her for his son, then he will deal with her according to the customary rights of daughters."*
4. If he completes the contract and takes her to wife he must maintain his duty to her even if he takes another wife in addition to her *"If he takes another wife, he must not diminish the first one's food, her clothing, or her marital rights (sex).*

It is evident the Law allowed a man to have more than one wife as long as he was able to care for both. If this was adultery, execution would have been demanded but God is providing a law that expresses his expectations for the man who chooses to marry more than one woman. If God would have disapproved of a man marrying more than one woman he could have forbid it as he did adultery, homosexuality, bestiality etc. etc.

Another portion of the Law that God provided to govern relational activity is found in Lev 18.

Lev 18:7 *You must not expose your father's nakedness by having sexual intercourse with your mother. She is your mother; you must not have intercourse with her. 18:8 You must not have sexual intercourse with your father's wife; she is your father's nakedness. 18:9 You must not have sexual intercourse with your sister, whether she is your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she is born in the same household or born outside it; you must not have sexual intercourse with either of them.*

Here God forbids a man from lying with his mother or his father's wife, "...by having sexual intercourse with your mother... or intercourse with your father's wife...". God did not condemn the father for having two wives or forbid the man from taking another, instead it is clear God honored those marriages and demanded the man to do the same. Furthermore, God forbids the man to lay with his biological sister or half-sister through his father's wife "...whether she is your father's daughter or your mother's daughter..." If polygyny was immoral, there is simply no explanation for God allowing it to continue.

The translator note for the NET bible has this to say

*"(tn Heb "the nakedness of your father she is." See the note on v. 7 above. This law refers to another wife of the man's father, who is not that man's mother. The laws in the Pentateuch sometimes assume the possibility that a man may have more than one wife (cf., e.g., Deut 21:15-17)."*

Those who try and force western monogamy into these texts as applying to a divorce and remarriage situation are imposing American culture into the biblical text. These Laws were authored by a man who had two wives and it was a common practice to have multiple wives for men who lived under the Law. These marriages were common to the heroes of scripture under the law as recorded in the bible, Moses, David, Ezra, Gideon, and many more, forty mentioned by name and thousands in general reference. Their marriages were not based on ignorance of these laws, literally their lives depended on a knowledge and obedience to the Law and breaking the law brought death.

One more detail usually escapes the reader here in Lev 18:17 *You must not have sexual intercourse with both a woman and her daughter; you must not take as wife either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to have intercourse with them. They are closely related to her – it is lewdness.* 18:18 *You must not take a woman in marriage and then marry her sister as a rival wife while she is still alive, to vex her.*

God forbids a man from marrying a woman and her daughter, granddaughter or sister as a rival to vex her *"both a woman and her daughter...you must not take as wife either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter...not take a woman in marriage and then marry her sister as a rival wife ..."* If polygyny is a 'no way' to God, this list of prohibitions would be pointless. He could have simply said he couldn't marry a woman and another woman but he does not. Instead, God only forbids certain kinds of polygyny thus establishing there is a right and wrong way to go about it. If one holds that polygyny is a sin then he puts God in the position of informing us how to sin righteously here.

So far it is easily ascertained that polygyny was not contrary to biblical law, but as we will see the Law was more than friendly to the practice it actually required it in some cases.

## **The Law of the Levirate (Deut. 25:5-10)**

God, in His infinite love and wisdom, devised a law that inhibited greed, and economic chaos on the one hand, and promoted the welfare of the widow on the other. It is known as the “kinsman redeemer” or the “law of the levirate.” Levirate comes from the Latin word *levir* which means “husband’s brother”. The basic idea is that, when a man died childless, his brother or another “near” kinsman was to take the widow to be his wife. This ensured that someone would be there to take care of her essential needs, one of which, we have seen (Exodus 21), was a chance to have children who would take care of her even beyond the lifetime of this second husband. This arrangement also protected the family of the husband from losing control of family property, perhaps to a distant, tribe. By this law, the property would remain the possession of the husband’s tribe. Still further, the custom protected the widow from being denied inheritance support by her new provider (when he died). The deceased’s brother was prohibited from considering the property of his brother his. Legally it belonged to the firstborn male child of the couple, a child who was legally considered the offspring of the widow and her first husband. The child had the rights to the property, not his birth father. Thus, the husband’s relatives kept the property in the family as a whole but not for themselves specifically. Any attempt to “short-circuit” the system by failing to marry the widow or by failing to make an honest effort to impregnate her was considered a grave social injustice and a sin in God’s eyes.

Even before God gave the Law, He enforced its concept among the patriarchs. One only has to read the sad story of Tamar and Onan (and Judah) in Genesis 38 to see how seriously both human beings and God took this whole matter. Onan’s abuse of the system was punished more severely than the Law later would require. Tamar was an ancestor of Christ, so we can see how important this matter was to God. Later, the issue returns in that same line when Ruth is redeemed by Boaz.

And as far as the Law of Moses is concerned, the arrangement was sanctioned in a severe and straightforward manner. In Deuteronomy 25:7-10 we read that any brother not wanting to do his duty was publicly humiliated, and a lasting stigma was placed upon him:

*7 "But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' 8 "Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, 'I do not desire to take her,' 9 then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, 'Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' 10 "In Israel his name shall be called, 'The house of him whose sandal is removed.'* (NASB)

But what would happen if the brother or near kinsman was already married? Could he not plead exemption from responsibility to the widow based upon Gen 2? For the sake of primal monogamy, would he not be an exception to the kinsman redeemer rule? The answer seems to be, “NO”. If you read the law carefully, you will see that the curse that was placed upon him also rested upon his house.” As the word is used in Hebrew, this reference to his “house” does not speak of the building in which he lived, but to his family—his existing family, which would have most likely involved at least a wife. There is no provision in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 for a marital

exemption. Had God considered polygyny immoral and against His "Creation Ordinances", He surely would have included such an exception in the text itself. Such exceptions are not lacking in the Law. In the laws regulating fornication, the man was to marry the woman he defiled, unless her father vetoed it (Ex. 22:16-17). Or, if a man had sex with an engaged woman they were both executed, unless it was rape (Deut. 22:25). Righteousness in a fallen world called for the provision of the widow, even if it entailed polygyny. Polygyny was not immoral per se; widow-neglect based on commitment to monogamy was.

## Seduction Laws

In the Laws pertaining to sexual seduction there are no exception clauses for the already married man Ex 22:16 "*If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged and has sexual relations with her, he must surely endow her to be his wife.*" This law makes clear that if "she is a virgin not betrothed" but does not mention the man's status at all. If a man seduced a virgin that was betrothed they were both to be executed as pointed out earlier, but if she was not, he was obligated to endow her as a wife regardless of his marital status. The only stipulation given is if the father refused, not if the man is betrothed or married already. God did not provide loop holes for men to exploit women. If he enjoyed her sexually then he had to take responsibility for her with no exception for the sake of monogamy.

One of the most overlooked textual factors in scripture is the lack of reciprocating laws.

Whereas this is consistent through the entire scripture, at this point our focus is the Law. I will not post the three passages I am about to comment on for the sake of space but I will supply the references and trust that you will look them up.

Deut 22:13-21 provides a law concerning an accusation against a woman concerning her virginity. Her parents were to bring the stained sheets to prove her virginity. If they could not produce the evidence, she was to be put to death at her father's house "*because she played the harlot in her father's home*". Where is the reciprocal law? What if the woman accused the man of not being a virgin? There is no reciprocating law prescribing how to deal with that situation because it is not a 'situation' at all to God. The truth of the matter is, the man's virginity is never mentioned because his current marital condition is irrelevant to him marrying, as I have well established in this article. Not only is there a lack of reciprocating law, but by God's design of a male there is a lack of ability to prove one way or the other for the man.

Deut 24:1-4 if a man divorced his wife he was to give her a writing of divorce so that she could remarry without being charged with adultery and executed. Where is the reciprocal law? Why didn't the woman have to provide the man with proof of divorce? Simply because the man could marry regardless of his current marital status, he needed no proof to remarry because he needed no divorce to marry.

Num 5:11-31 this trial was God's instruction for the case of a husband being suspicious of his wife's involvement with another man. The priest would have her drink a little bit of dirty water and if she was guilty God would supernaturally cause certain reactions to occur. If she was not

guilty, then God would allow the dirty water to do what it would do naturally, nothing at all. Where is the reciprocal law? What if the wife was jealous or suspicious of her husband with another lady? Oh yeah, she didn't have to be suspicious, he didn't have to hide it, because a man could have more than one wife according to the Law.

In the Law there is explicit and implicit support for the morality of polygyny. If one holds that polygyny is immoral he has to ignore clear expectations expressed by God himself, and develop reciprocal stipulations and laws that are simply not there. Sexuality and marriage are clearly different for men and women as seen in Genesis, the Law and as we will see, in the New Testament as well. In light of the Law, Dr John Walton of Wheaton Bible College had only this to say *"In Israel, as in most of the ancient world, monogamy was generally practiced. Polygamy was not contrary to law or morals"*—Bible Background Commentary

The final Law to be observed is Deut 21:10-14

*21:10 When you go out to do battle with your enemies and the Lord your God allows you to prevail and you take prisoners, 21:11 if you should see among them an attractive woman whom you wish to take as a wife, 21:12 you may bring her back to your house. She must shave her head, trim her nails, 21:13 discard the clothing she was wearing when captured, and stay in your house, lamenting for her father and mother for a full month. After that you may have sexual relations with her and become her husband and she your wife. 21:14 If you are not pleased with her, then you must let her go where she pleases. You cannot in any case sell her; you must not take advantage of her, since you have already humiliated her.*

This Law allowed a man to take a captive woman as a wife if he desired and does not bother to limit the men who would do this to unmarried, betrothed men. Lest we force western monogamy into this Law consider Numbers 31 where they brought back 32,000 virgin women but only 12,000 Israelite men went to war. Are we really to assume that all these men were single, that is ludicrous, in fact we know several of these men by name and know they were married men. Even if these men were single when going to war, after dividing these woman amongst them they would have been married and married to multiple women at that. You do the math 12,000 warriors and 32,000 women.

## Common Objections

The first objection to be raised would be the misinterpretation of a Law in Duet 17:14-17 that warns future kings of three activities. This Law is often taken out of context to support our anti-polygyny sentiments, however when interpreted in context it is in full agreement with the rest of the Law.

*17:14 When you come to the land the Lord your God is giving you and take it over and live in it and then say, "I will select a king like all the nations surrounding me," 17:15 you must select without fail a king whom the Lord your God chooses. From among your fellow citizens you must appoint a king – you may not designate a foreigner who is not one of your fellow Israelites.*

*17:16 Moreover, he must not accumulate horses for himself or allow the people to return to Egypt to do so, for the Lord has said you must never again return that way. 17:17 Furthermore, he must not marry many wives lest his affections turn aside, and he must not accumulate much silver and gold.*

The first thing to be said is, if this were a law forbidding polygyny then we would have one law contradicting at least six others that allowed for it (i.e. Deut 21:15, Ex 21:10). It would make no sense for God to make so many provisions for something and then contradict himself with one statement. To use this verse in that manner is carelessly handling the word of God, ignoring the immediate context and overall continuity of the Law.

All the laws observed thus far in this article pertain to the general population of Israel but this law has the specific designation to kings. Why would God allow every man to have more than one wife if he chose except the King? Our understanding of why kings married helps explain this as political marriages. Strong kings took (foreign) wives as a means of insuring treaties with foreign nations. Such wives would doubtless be idolaters and bring in the kinds of false religion seen in the life and times of Solomon. The law (Deut. 7:3) condemns marriage with women of the land for this reason. This verse simply applies the broader law to kings. They are to avoid the 'political marriages' that was common among kings to insure peace treaties with the kings whose daughters they had married. Such a king as David, whose wives did not fit the prohibited category would be exempt. The best example of a king who was condemned by this law is Solomon, who provides an example of why God forbid this activity "*lest his affections turn aside....*" in his case this warning came true.

If any doubt the above interpretation, they need to consider the following: In the context kings are also prohibited from multiplying their horses and money "*..he must not accumulate horses for himself..., he must not marry many wives lest his affections turn aside...and he must not accumulate much silver and gold.*". If we were to apply the anti-polygyny logic regarding multiplying wives consistently, we would have to imagine that kings were also restricted to one horse and one shekel. On the other hand, if kings could have been true to their inspired limitations by having more than one horse or shekel, then they could have been just as moral by having more than one wife, just not many political wives. If one tries to use this law to overrule the entire law as a whole his interpretation is guilty of proof-texting, manipulating the text to support his own preconceived ideas or personal preference.

Often times we try to explain away the Law's allowance with unqualified statements such as, "God tolerated polygyny but discouraged it in the law, evidenced in the fact that he regulated it." This is a ridiculous unqualified statement! If we were to apply the same logic to other practices we would be left with God discouraging everything. That would be like saying God discouraged worship because he regulated it, or God discouraged procreation because he provided regulations concerning sexual behavior. Regulations do not provide any logical basis to accept this objection at all. If anything, regulations informs us there is a right way and wrong way to go about something, it naturally implies the moral propriety of the practice if done the

way prescribed in the regulations. If God saw any immorality in polygyny then he could have prescribed execution for those who choose to practice it, just as he did adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and all things considered immoral. If God was about toleration then he could have tolerated all these as well. The truth of the matter, the entire law allowed for it and provided guidance concerning it. Worst of all though is this unqualified statement ignores the fact that polygyny was not only allowed but required in certain circumstances.

Also the attempt at explaining away God allowing polygyny in the Law as toleration leaves us with a defective view of the law that contradicts the biblical writers. In psalms 119 David repeatedly states the law was perfect and in Romans 7:12-14 Paul states the Law was perfect holy and good. Paul then explains the problem with the Law was not because it was short of God's standard, but because it was his exact standard and that we as imperfect people could not live up to its perfect demands. Those who appeal to a defective Law argument are in disagreement with not only Moses and the Prophets but the New Testament's evaluation of it as well.

### Paul to the saints at Rome

*Rom 7:12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. 7:13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin, so that it would be shown to be sin, produced death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual – but I am unspiritual, sold into slavery to sin.*

### Homosexuality

Leviticus 18:22-23 makes clear the law leaves no compromise with this behavior and any who chose to live in this manner was to be cut off from Israel, along with bestiality.

*22 You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman, it is a detestable act. 18:23 You must not have sexual intercourse with any animal to become defiled with it, and a woman must not stand before an animal to have sexual intercourse with it; it is a perversion.*

As a side note, he refers to these two acts as detestable and a perversion but has no issue with the father mentioned in this text having two wives, and does not forbid the man from marrying a woman and another. If God had no problem openly declaring what was perversion and detestable then the only explanation for him ignoring the other would be that it was acceptable according to his morals and not perversion or detestable as we preach today.

God's moral frame work in the Old Testament is very different from our moral frame work in modern America. Adultery was always defined by the woman's marital status not the man's. We see examples of a man committing adultery against another man by lying with his wife and a woman committing adultery against her husband by lying with a man other than her husband, but nowhere do we see a man committing adultery against his wife by marrying another wife or

a woman committing adultery against an existing wife by marrying her husband.

## Two Case studies

### David

If one reads the story of David his failure with Bathsheba is likely to be one event that will not be forgotten (2Sam 11, 12). At the time of that moral failure David had already taken at least six wives with no reprimand from God at all (2 Sam 3:2), however, when he took Bathsheba, God sent a prophet and judged David. When David married the six women prior to Bathsheba they were non-betrothed, non-married women. He was perfectly within the moral frame work of the Law God had provided. When David lay with Bathsheba she was married to another man named Uriah, that is adultery and that brought judgment. In David's story we can see him having six wives was not adultery or anything out of the way to be corrected. He was not an adulterer nor the women considered adulteresses in God's eyes, but when he took another man's wife God judged him for adultery. In fact God explicitly states that several of his wives were a blessing from him and had that not been enough he would have given David more.

*12:7 Nathan said to David, "You are that man! This is what the Lord God of Israel says: 'I chose you to be king over Israel and I rescued you from the hand of Saul. 12:8 I gave you your master's house, and put your master's wives into your arms, I also gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all that somehow seems insignificant, I would have given you so much more as well! 12:9 Why have you shown contempt for the word of the Lord by doing evil in my sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and you have taken his wife as your own! You have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 12:10 So now the sword will never depart from your house. For you have despised me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own!'*

The text not only asserts that God approves of Polygyny but that it can be a blessing. The case study of David shows the life application of the Law of Moses and that the polygyny laws were not merely God tolerating a sin but seeing it as a blessing. In the next case study Tom Shipley makes an interesting observation.

### Joash

*24:1 Joash was seven years old when he began to reign. He reigned for forty years in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> His mother was Zibiah, who was from Beer Sheba. 24:2 Joash did what the Lord approve throughout the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest. 24:3 Jehoiada chose two wives for him who gave him sons and daughters. II Chronicles 24:1-3*

The story of the young king Joash is in many ways the story of Jehoiada the priest. If it had not been for Jehoiada and his wife Jehoshabeath, all of the royal seed of David would have been slain by the wicked queen Athaliah. Scripture makes it plain that *Jehoiada was zealous for the Law of the Lord* and for the Davidic monarchy. Scripture relates that Jehoiada risked his own life by his act of proclaiming Joash king and opposing Athaliah. Joash was the only descendant of David that had escaped. After Athaliah had been deposed and slain, "Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the LORD's people," (II Chron. 23:16.) This was followed by the destruction of the temple of Baal,



and the restoration of the Law of Moses.

Commenting upon Joash's polygamy—which was the result of Jehoiada getting two wives for Joash at the age of sixteen—Walter Kaiser states: “The case of Joash (2 Chron. 24:2-3) depends upon the interpretation of...‘for him’ or ‘for himself’ and whether he married those two wives in succession or simultaneously.” — (“Toward Old Testament Ethics,” footnote, pg. 183)

But Kaiser is kicking against the pricks here. It is very evident from the text (and the context) that Jehoiada got two wives for *Joash*, not himself, and that he got these two wives for the young king at the same time. It is also clear that the reason was to replenish the royal seed of David and assure a successor to the Davidic monarchy.

How shall we evaluate Jehoiada's act of getting multiple wives for Joash? Was Jehoiada saying, in effect, “Let us do evil that good may come?” It is pointless to plead necessity. Jehoiada certainly knew of the Divine promise to David to preserve the royal seed. With or without multiple wives, Jehoiada knew that God would preserve the Davidic line. And we must not fail to consider Scripture's portrayal of Jehoiada's zealousness for the Law of Moses; this is *very* prominent in the text. We must certainly presume that *Jehoiada believed himself to be acting within the boundaries of the Law*; if Jehoiada believed that the Law of Moses defined polygamy as adultery, or was otherwise unlawful, he certainly would have feared further Divine punishment for such a course of action. The truth is however, that Jehoiada anticipated Divine blessing and the prospering of his actions which, in fact, ensued: “and he (Joash) begat sons and daughters” by his two wives. Clearly God was with Jehoiada in his plan to replenish the royal seed.

The example of Joash, therefore, provides us with strong exegetical evidence of the lawfulness of polygamy. We are plainly told that Joash did right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada and that Jehoiada selected and gave Joash two wives. This text explicitly states God's approval of polygyny. If it had been *wrong* for him to take two wives, this certainly would have been indicated in Chronicles which is specifically focused on characterizing the actions of the kings of Israel as either good or evil

## The New Testament

Before we evaluate what the New Testament has to say about the subject let us establish the proper approach. Many start off with our current ideals and definitions and impose them on the text. However, we must start from their ideals and established definitions and look for a redefining point if we are to claim a change. If we cannot find anywhere that God redefines what he has already been established then we must accept the already established definition. Take for example; we define adultery as sexual relations of either spouse with someone that is not their one spouse. So far you can see a man was not limited to one spouse, polygyny was not adultery. Adultery was always determined by the woman's marital status. Therefore, we must accept their definition when the word is used and not assign our modern cultural definition to it, unless a New Testament author redefines it.

Some today write and teach that there was no practice of polygyny in the time of the early churches. This is a very common assertion by many to dismiss the seeming silence of the New Testament. It is so common that many take this ideology at face value and thus continue to spread this viewpoint. However, if one uses first hand historical resources and does original research one will find this idea is without merit. Examination of the original first hand eyewitnesses in the early church period and immediate generation after shows us the practice had not died out.

First, Josephus was a historian of that era and was a contemporary of both Christ and the apostles. He is considered by many, along with Philo, to have been one of the most accurate Jewish historians of his day. He spoke several times about polygyny being practiced.

Josephus himself made these statements about polygyny in his historical writings. In speaking of King Herod Josephus recorded this: *"Now Herod the king had at this time nine wives; one of them, Antipater's mother, and another, the high priest's daughter, by whom he had a son of his own name"* (The Antiquities of the Jews, 17:1:3:19). and *"for it is the ancient practice among us to have many wives at the same time"* (Antiquities 17:1.2). So by these historical statements we know the practice existed among people at the time of Christ and the apostles.

Second, recent discoveries have only solidified these excerpts of the historical record. One recent discovery is what is known as 'The Cave Letters'. In these documents we have the legal documents of a woman named Babbatha who is said to be the second wife of a man named Judah who is also married to a woman named Miriam. The details of these documents clearly reveal this family lived at the end of the first century and that it was a common family at the time.

If anyone chooses to go the route of explaining the lack of condemnation in the New Testament writings as its non-existence not providing an occasion to be addressed then he has simply not done his homework concerning the subject. If indeed the New Testament remains silent as they assert, it could only be they felt no need to correct a practice they considered perfectly acceptable.

Others, realizing that it did exist, cannot accept that it might have been just as acceptable in the New as it was in the Old, twist and distort New Testament passages to suit their own preference. They assign definitions to terms such as adultery rather than accept established definitions. Let us look at a few passages where they claim the redefining occurs.

The first attempt is in Matthew 5:27-28

*5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 5:28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Any attempt at establishing change here is simply bad scholarship. The fact that adultery is used here informs us that someone is married and according to God's established definition until this

point it would have to be the woman, not a non-betrothed, non-married lady. Another consideration that agrees with that is the Greek term for woman (gune). Our modern culture causes us to miss the point. In our culture as a young virgin progresses in age she becomes a woman when she turns a certain age, and when she is given in marriage she becomes a wife. In their culture there was no such thing as an age of majority. They only have two words one means virgin and young maid (panthenos) and the other means women or wife (gune). They only used two words to classify the females among themselves not three as we do. A young maid/ virgin, was so until she was given in marriage and only then she became a woman (gune). The fact that Jesus used the word 'gune' instead of 'panthenos' informs us this is a married woman he is speaking about. He is forbidding any man from desiring another man's wife. If Jesus wanted to apply this principle to women in general virgin or wives then he would have used the word 'Thelys' which speaks of female as a gender and a whole.

The next passage that is mustard is Matt 19:3-6

*19:3 Then some Pharisees came to him in order to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?" 19:4 He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female, 19:5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 19:6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

This portion of scripture is packed full of content and much of what it teaches is missed due to poor exegesis. Many people approach the content of this passage as if it was a sermon but it is not. Jesus did not pick a subject and decide to elaborate on it. Notice how it is structured, the Pharisees ask a question, Jesus answers, they ask another question Jesus answers. The question that is asked is about frivolous divorce. That is the subject matter, divorce, not monogamy and polygamy. It is frivolous divorce vs. permanent marriage. Jesus appeals to "the beginning" in order to show that marriage was God's intention for men and women and frivolous divorce is not in line with that. Those who claim that Jesus is pointing out the one to one ratio are inserting that into the text. He says male and female as genders not individuals. The reason he points to that relationship is to establish priority. To be first gave one priority, we can see this in Col 1 dealing with the preeminence of Christ, and also John said he wasn't worthy to unloose Jesus sandals because "he was before me". This can also be seen in 1Tim 2:15 when he declares men preminent in the church because man was made before the woman. Notice what Jesus is contrasting here in his quote from Genesis it is the marriage relationship vs. parental relationship "*for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife*" not monogamy vs. polygamy. Point being he is pointing out the marriage relationship takes priority because it was the first relationship created not parent child. If these men felt such a strong duty to their parents then they should feel even greater obligation to the care of a wife. Just as they didn't frivolously throw away their parents they were not allowed to frivolously throw away a wife. If you can't un-parent your parent you certainly could not un-wife a wife. When you became 'one flesh' "kin" or "related" it was even more binding than father and mother relation. So, the question can a man put away a wife for every cause, then the answer no. Not only do they miss the subject matter of text when using this as a proof text for monogamy only, they also impose American culture in on the text. The man asks if it is lawful to put away a wife

for every cause. Who is to say if this is his only wife? As established earlier he could have had three. Jesus answers no, so that would mean if he currently had three wives then he would have understood he was not allowed to frivolously divorce even one, leaving him bound to all three unless two were not considered wives, but the biblical record states otherwise. He may have had only one but certainly some in the audience had more than one. In any case the answer to the question would have been clear whether you had one or multiple no frivolous divorce allowed. Clearly Jesus references the first relationship to show its preeminence not its ratio. One last note is in order here; Jesus is not completely forbidding divorce, only frivolous divorce. They ask a specific question and receive a specific answer. Can a man divorce a wife for every cause? Jesus answer is no to the question of every cause divorce. This does not say there are no legitimate reasons that allow for divorce only that you could not divorce her because she may have burned your toast.

We can see that is exactly the understanding they got out of Jesus answer by the second question in verses 7-10.

19:7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us *to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce* her?” 19:8 Jesus said to them, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of your hard hearts, but from the beginning it was not this way. 19:9 Now I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.” 19:10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the case of a husband with a wife, it is better not to marry!”

Obviously Jesus answer left them puzzled because Moses allowed divorce in certain situations. Supposing he is contradicting Moses they are quick to point out the Law. Many commentators make the same mistake by claiming Jesus overrides Deut 24:1-4 here, but once again poor exegesis. In addressing the contradiction belief, Moses allowed divorce in a certain situation ‘uncleanness’ and it was heavily debated by the Rabbis exactly what that meant. Christ in his first answer to frivolous divorce says no, but provides a stipulation for legit divorce ‘fornication’ in his answer to the second question, remaining consistent with Moses. Some see an alteration in Jesus teaching here but that is not so. He does not allow for a man to put away a wife in order to take another, that is consistent with the Law and the Prophets (Ex 21:10, Mal 2). Jesus takes issue with serial monogamy not polygamy. He says nothing about a man taking another wife in addition to his current, only that the man cannot divorce his current to take another which is precisely what Ex 21:10, Mal 2 teach. The same Law that already forbids this practice, was conducive to polygyny so why would Jesus restating the same rule all the sudden be inconducive to it? This by no means limits a man to marrying only one wife, only him divorcing one to marry another.

Apart from the twisting of those two passages one has a hard time finding an exact definition or detailed example of adultery in the New Testament. Sure, there is the woman caught in adultery in John 8 but as in most cases in the New Testament he doesn’t give the details, the author assumes his audience is well aware of what it is. So, we find in the New Testament the word used and never defined or redefined because the audience’s current understanding of it is sufficient. If the biblical writers thought it were defined properly for the first four thousand

years of revelation there is no reason for them to define it or redefine it. With that said, there is one passage that does give us the details of the matter in the New Testament Romans 7:1-4

7:2 For a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of the marriage. 7:3 So then, if she is joined to another man while her husband is alive, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she is joined to another man, she is not an adulteress.

Notice Paul assert this in terms of the woman not the man. Sometimes the word 'man' is used in a generic sense representing the entire human race, enveloping both men and women. However never is the word woman used in that way, it is always gender specific. If Paul would have seen adultery being gender neutral as we do today he would have had to use the generic sense of man but instead limits it to the gender specific word woman. Thus determining adultery based upon the woman's marital status. Paul is very skilled in the Law and dare not assert this in terms of the man because he knows the Law never does so. Paul speaks of this Law in the present tense suggesting his audience is still living by its defined morals at the present. If the entire context is read he uses their current understanding of adultery that is consistent with the Law to teach a spiritual truth. This explains why the authors of the New Testament never define adultery but only employ the word, because his audience has a proper view that is consistent with four thousand years of revealed truth from God. If one makes the claim that adultery in the New Testament was expanded to include polygyny the burden of proof is laid upon his assertion.

If the believers of the New Testament had a fundamentally different moral than the Old Testament how would we deal with passages such as 1Cor 6:9?

*6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals,*

If New Testament teaching and believers defined adultery and sexual immorality as we do today then passages such as this would exclude Abraham, David and almost all of our Old Testament heroes from inheriting the coming kingdom of God when the messiah returns. We know this not to be the case because Jesus specifically states that Abraham will be there. Also isn't the kingdom based on the promise to David and his descendant? In order for us to accept the New Testament's appraisal of Abraham and David (who are praised quite often) and other Old Testament heroes we must accept that polygyny was not considered adultery or immoral to the New Testament audience or authors. Had the definition expanded in the New Testament then Paul would have had lot of explaining to do, especially with statements such as these. The only reasonable explanation for the New Testament writer's insistence of the Old Testaments saints presence in the coming kingdom is that they did not see polygyny as adultery or sexually immoral, therefore excluding them from the exclusion sins.

*1 Cor 7:1-2 It is good for a man not to touch a woman.....to avoid fornication let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband.*

This text is probably the most reached for when discussing the subject. There is no statement in it that suggests exclusivity. The possessive “own” is simply a possessive with no exclusive quality; any exclusive idea to it is us once again bringing ideas into a text. Take for example if we were going to meet for lunch and I said I’ll meet you there I am going to take my own car. Does that mean I only have one car? I could very well have three in my garage. The possessive seeks to establish that I will be riding in a car that belongs to me. Just as a man that returns to his own country, does he exclusively possess his own country? Paul is telling singles to avoid prostitution get married and this statement does not carry any exclusive connotations at all, only possessive. Paul is not solving the issue of adultery because that would require the word (moichios) he uses (pornea) which is prostitution. This text would say to avoid prostitution get married.

Another favorite is the commandment in Eph 5:26  
*Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church.....*

Once again we are faced with the reoccurring problem of reading our ideas into a text. There is no support for love to be true that it must be exclusive, in fact love as defined in scripture is not exclusive at all. The word used for love is agape and it is the same love used when we are commanded to love our fellow believers. If one says this love can only be in an exclusive context then he must also only love one member in the church as well. The idea that love must be exclusive to be true comes from Plato’s dialogues which is really the source for our understanding of love in western society.

All of the specific instructions concerning the marital relationships leaves it open without demanding any change.

*5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord*

*5:25 Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her*

There is nothing in this statement that would bind New Testament believers to a one to one ratio. These commands could apply to a polygynous marriage as much as a monogamous one. Wouldn’t you think if Paul planned on changing the rules of marriage we would see some specific teaching? After all he would have had to explain the new rules wouldn’t he? All New Testament instruction to the general population remain as open ended statements such as these (Col 3:18, 1Pet 3).

It is time Christians wake up to the fact we have accepted philosophy rather than revelation

from God.

Just as agape can include more than one friend or child it also can include more than one wife. It does no good to appeal to the idea of sexual love being distinct and what he is referring to. If that were the case then he would have used the word Eros instead of agape. One cannot appeal to the word church as singular because that is a false understanding as well. The Greek word ecclesia translated church is actually plural. It literally means assembly. What about an individual would provoke the idea of an assembly, nothing at all, an assembly requires plurality. The word ecclesia is a plural singular like the word class; there are many students that make up one class. This is the idea Paul consistently teaches with illustrations about the one body being made of multiple members. There is nothing in this text that would suggest the imagined one to one ratio, if anything Paul's consistent teaching suggest a plural to one ratio. Eph 4, 1Cor 12 speak of the church (assembly) as many members in one body attached to one head, who is Christ.

As can be seen so far all of our arguments against polygyny are not based on the bible but abstract philosophy we have accepted from the world and force into the text. There is no wonder the divorce rate of the church rivals the world's because we are approaching love, marriage and all relational issues using their definitions and ways. This article might be offensive to some but as an honest bible student I have to stick with the text not my personal preferences.

As a Christian I must be transformed by the renewing of my mind (Rom 12:1-2). If the bible presents me with an issue that defers with my current understanding then I must seek to understand it, not ignore it or adjust it to suit me. Much of what we hear today being heralded from the pulpits is customized Christianity. It is customized to fit our culture without offending anyone or challenging socially accepted views. It is time for Christians to return to their bibles for themselves and decide how biblical they really want to be.

## **A Theologian**