

THE FAMILY IN ISLAM (PART 2 OF 3): MARRIAGE

Rating: 4.5

Description: How marriage is intertwined with faith, ethics and morality, with evidence from Islamic scripture.

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Marriage

“And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell with them in serenity and tranquility. And He has put love and compassion between your hearts. Truly in that are signs for those who reflect.”
(Quran 30:21)

Marriage is the most ancient of human social institutions. Marriage came into existence with the creation of the first man and woman: Adam and Eve. All the Prophets since then were sent as examples for their communities, and every Prophet, from the first to the last, upheld the institution of marriage as the divinely-sanctioned expression of heterosexual companionship.^[1] Even today, it is still considered more right and proper that couples introduce each other as: “my wife” or “my husband” rather than: “my lover” or “my partner”. For it is through marriage that men and woman legally fulfill their carnal desires, their instincts for love, neediness, companionship, intimacy, and so on.

“...They (your wives, O men) are a garment for you and you (men) are a garment for them...” (Quran 2:187)

Over the course of time, some groups have come to hold extreme beliefs about the opposite sex and sexuality. Women, in particular, were considered evil by many religious men, and so contact with them had to be kept to a minimum. Thus, monasticism, with its lifetime of abstention and celibacy, was invented by those who wanted what they reckoned to be a pious alternative to marriage and a life more godly.

“Then, We sent after them, Our Messengers, and We sent Jesus son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him, compassion and mercy. But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves; We did not prescribe for them, but (they sought it) only to please God therewith, but that they did not observe it with the right observance. So We gave those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are rebellious sinners.” (Quran 57:27)

The only family that monks would know (Christian, Buddhist, or otherwise) would be their fellow monks at the monastery or temple. In the case of Christianity, not only men, but also women, could attain the pious ranks by becoming nuns, or “brides of Christ”.

This unnatural situation has often led to a great number of social vices, such as child abuse, homosexuality and illegitimate sexual relations actually occurring among the cloistered – all of which are considered actual criminal sins. Those Muslim heretics who have followed the non-Islamic practice of abstention and hermitage, or who have at least claimed to have taken an even more pious path to God than the Prophets themselves, have similarly succumbed to these same vices and to an equally scandalous degree.

The Prophet Muhammad in his own lifetime made clear his feelings at the suggestion that marriage could be an obstacle to drawing closer to God. Once, a man vowed to the Prophet that he would have nothing to do with women, that is, to never marry. The Prophet responded by sternly declaring:

“By God! I am the most God-fearing amongst you! Yet... I marry! Whoever turns away from my sunnah (inspired way) is not from me (i.e. not a true believer).”

“Say (to the people O Muhammad): ‘If you love God then follow me, God will (then) love you and forgive you of your sins. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.’”
(Quran 3:31)

In reality, far from viewing marriage as bad for one’s faith, Muslims hold marriage to be an integral part of their religious devotion. As mentioned before, the Prophet Muhammad explicitly stated that marriage is half of the Religion (of Islam). In other words, perhaps half of all Islamic virtues, such as fidelity, chastity, charity, generosity, tolerance, gentleness, striving, patience, love, empathy, compassion, caring, learning, teaching, reliability, courage, mercy, forbearance, forgiveness, etc., find their natural expression through married life. Hence, in Islam, God-consciousness and good character are supposed to be the principle criteria that a spouse looks for in his or her prospective marriage partner. The Prophet Muhammad said:

“A woman is married for (one of) four reasons: her wealth, her status, her beauty and her religious devotion. So marry the religious woman, else you be a loser.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

Undoubtedly, the social malaise and decay that is prevalent in many parts of the non-Islamic world also finds expression in some parts of the Muslim world as well. Nevertheless, promiscuity, fornication and adultery are still roundly condemned throughout Islamic societies and have yet to be decriminalized to the level of merely “fooling around”, “playing the field” or other such trivial pursuits. Indeed, Muslims still recognize and acknowledge the great destructiveness that pre-marital and extra-marital relationships have on communities. In fact the Quran makes clear that the mere accusation of impropriety carries very severe consequences in this life and the next.

“And those who accuse chaste women, and do not produce four witnesses (to unequivocally prove their accusation), flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their testimony forever; for they are truly wicked sinners.” (Quran 24:4)

“Verily, those who slander chaste women, innocent, unsuspecting, believing women: they are cursed in this world and the next. And for them will be a great torment.” (Quran 24:23)

Ironically, while it is unmarried women who perhaps suffer most from the consequences of promiscuous relationships, some of the more radical voices of the feminist movement have called for the abolition of the institution of marriage. Sheila Cronin of the movement, NOW, speaking from the blinkered perspective of a fringe feminist whose society is reeling from the failure of the traditional western marriage to grant women security, protection from sexually transmitted diseases, and many other problems and abuses, opined: “Since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the women’s movement must concentrate on attacking this institution. Freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage.”

Marriage in Islam, however, or rather, marriage according to Islam, is in and of itself a vehicle for securing freedom for women. No greater example of the perfect Islamic marriage exists than that of the Prophet Muhammad, who told his followers: **“The best of you are those who best treat their women. And I am the best of people to my women.”**^[2] The Prophet’s beloved wife, A’isha, attested to the freedom her husband’s treatment afforded her when she said:

“He always joined in the housework and would at times mend his clothes, repair his shoes and sweep the floor. He would milk, tether and feed his animals and do household chores.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

“Indeed in the Messenger of God you have an excellent example to follow for whoever hopes in God and the Last Day and remembers God much.” (Quran 33:21)

Footnotes:

[1] Whether or not those Prophets were themselves married: Jesus, for example, ascended to heaven as an unmarried man. However, Muslims believe that he will return to earth before the End of Time in a second coming wherein he will reign supreme, a husband and father like any other family man. Thus, the recent controversy regarding the De Vinci Code fictional claims that Jesus married and had children is not blasphemous in the fact that it suggests that a Messiah could be a family man, merely premature.

[2] Narrated in *Al-Tirmidhi*.

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