

# Polygamy and Other ‘Acceptable’ Sins

1 Samuel 25:39-44

*Halifax: 14 September 2025*

## **Introduction:**

Today, the sermon will be a little different.

- We are going to look at the subject of polygamy.
- We have David’s polygamy set before us in our text, 1 Sam 25:39-44.

In the narrative,

- God has just restrained David from the sin of taking vengeance into his own hands against Nabal, a difficult, cantankerous man who insulted David—I won’t go into the details as we covered all this last week.
  - But the short version is that David overreacted to this man’s insult and set out to kill him and all the males in his house!
- We saw how the LORD graciously restrained David by the intervention of Nabal’s lovely wife, Abigail, who acted with tremendous wisdom and grace to restrain David.
  - God used her to keep David from committing a great sin that he would regret. David was glad. He blessed Abigail and blessed the LORD for restraining him.
  - Then God Himself took care of Nabal by bringing him to the end that he deserved.

This brings us to our text for this week.

- When Nabal died, David did not hesitate to ask Abigail to marry him and she did not hesitate to do so! They were both very godly, wise people. It was a good match.
  - But as we read on in the text, we are shown clearly that David was a polygamist.
  - It seems that David has been restrained from one sin only be brought into another!
  - Listen as I read the passage. It is 1 Samuel 25:39-44. Here is the Word of God.

**1 Sam 25:39-44:** So when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed *be* the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the LORD has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head.” And David sent and proposed to Abigail, to take her as his wife. <sup>40</sup> When the servants of David had come to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her saying, “David sent us to you, to ask you to become his wife.” <sup>41</sup> Then she arose, bowed her face to

the earth, and said, “Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” <sup>42</sup> So Abigail rose in haste and rode on a donkey, attended by five of her maidens; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. <sup>43</sup> David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and so both of them were his wives. <sup>44</sup> But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who *was* from Gallim.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

Often when Christians in our day read through the Old Testament (which they ought to do regularly by the way), we encounter things that are disturbing.

- When we talk to unbelievers, they will bring up things like polygamy, incest, slavery, genocide and the like and attack the Bible’s integrity.

Today, I want to look especially at polygamy, but I also have a bigger agenda for this sermon.

- I want to look at other sins that, like polygamy, are committed by relatively godly people and that seem to be acceptable to people and overlooked by the Lord.
- It is certainly true that there are some sins that are less heinous than others.
  - David's adultery would have been frowned upon by Israel and many of their neighbours, and God made a big deal about it, but his polygamy would have been quite acceptable and was indeed much less offensive to the Lord.
- There are lots of sins that are like that, and I want to use polygamy as an example of such sins to warn you against them and show you that they have worse consequences than we often think.
  - I want to warn you against indulging in sins that seem like they are acceptable to the people around us and to God.
    - We must never think, as we often do, that these sins are okay and will cause little harm, just because that harm does not seem to come right away.
    - Nor must we ever think that they are okay because a lot of people—even very good people like David—seem to be doing them without hesitation or consequences. We are going to see that this is a delusion!
    - Acceptable sins in the church and the world are not acceptable to God,

So let's dig into our subject.

## **I. What are some sins that seem to be acceptable?**

A. In the Old Testament, polygamy certainly was such a sin.

1. The first mention of it is in Genesis 4 with Lamech.
  - He was the great-great-great-grandson of Cain, the first murderer.
    - It is clear that Lamech did not repent of the sins of his fathers. He boasted for killing a man for wounding him, saying, "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."
  - This wicked man seems to be the first to take two wives.
    - So polygamy does not have a very noble beginning!
2. Nevertheless, after the flood, we have Abraham, the father of the faithful, who, in his weakness and doubt, took his wife Sarai's maidservant, Hagar, since Sarai was barren, and Abraham wanted to bring forth the child God had promised to him—the child that would save him and be a blessing in the end to all the families of the earth!
  - It was a foolish thing to do. If God has promised something, you do not need to commit sin to get it.
    - But of course that does make the sin less offensive because you didn't do it in rebellion against God, but to obtain a blessing that He promised.
    - We need to remember that Abraham did not have his own example to learn from like we do, and what's more, we still fall into the same trap.
      - What about a minister and a group of elders who will alter worship to appeal to the world in order to grow the church!
      - Or a man who will lie so that he can marry a godly woman that he wants to marry because she is godly—and be successful in marrying her!

- Or someone who will pretend like they cannot work so they can collect unemployment and go on a mission trip—and sometimes the Lord will not stop them.
- The Lord used Abraham’s folly to teach him and all of us that sinning to get what God promises was not necessary.
  - God let him do it. He did not stop him and even gave him a child by Hagar, but then 14 years later when Sarah was even more barren (and Abraham probably was too), the Lord renewed their youth and gave them a son.
  - By this the LORD showed that bringing the son He promised who would bring salvation into the world was something He must do by divine power, not by human striving and certainly not by disobedience.
    - By letting Abraham go on and have a child by Hagar, this lesson became much more potent!
    - The son would not come by human effort, but by divine power.
- 3. But the fact that Abraham had taken another wife without being stopped seemed to set in motion the notion that this was somehow acceptable.
  - The fact that this sin had begun to grow up in the world and was largely looked at as acceptable did not help anything either.
  - Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, took two wives in an effort to make sure that he could get the one wife he wanted. He did not want to offend the girl's father and risk the possibility of losing her by insisting that he would not marry her older sister first.
    - When these wives quarreled, he ended up also taking their maidservants, and so ended up with four wives who each bore him children.
  - As we see in our text, David took more than one wife... and later we will see him take even more. This was an example that caused many to stumble because David was a godly man.
    - His son Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (servant wives).
    - Most of Israel’s kings had multiple wives. Others in Israel apparently did this too, because the LORD even regulated it when He gave them the law.
      - This does not mean that he approved it. He regulated divorce and many other things, but that He did not outright forbid it shows that He did not regard it as heinous a sin as other sins.
    - Interestingly, polygamy went on in Israel until the time of the exile, but after that, it was rarely practiced. We don’t see much of it at all in Israel when Jesus came. I’ll say more about this later.
- 4. Thankfully, I have not met too many Christians that are advocating polygamy today.
  - But there has been some support for it popping up here in there in the last little while.
  - We will look at how it is prohibited in a bit...
  - but first...

B. Let's look at some sins that like polygamy, are considered quite acceptable to people today and that God seems to be quite tolerant of.

1. One of the biggest ones is breaking the Sabbath.

- There has been a huge change in the church in the last hundred years in that in prior centuries, almost all Christians agreed that the Lord's Day ought to be observed as the Christian Sabbath.
- This was instituted by Jesus through His apostles because we see it described as the custom in the churches they established.
  - For example, in Acts 20 verse 7, Paul arrives in Troas and stays there until the first day of the week when the church gathered to break bread—to have the Lord's Supper and hear preaching.
  - In Revelation 1, the Apostle John mentions that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, showing that the day held significance for him even when he was exiled in prison.
  - In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul instructs the believers to bring their offerings on the first day of the week.
  - Church history shows us the seamless observance of the Lord's Day from the time of the apostles—Justin Martyr speaks of in 100 AD as the day Christians gathered for worship, and when Constantine is converted, he brings it into law that the Christian Sabbath be observed.
    - The main debate was never over whether the Christian Sabbath should be observed, but whether the Jewish Sabbath should also be observed.
- It is true that God's people have often been slack about keeping the Sabbath, but the difference today is that many don't even think it matters if it is kept!
  - They will take passages that speak about continuing the Jewish sabbaths—which during the time of transition from Old Covenant worship to New Covenant worship were optional for a time—as if they speak to the optionality of the Lord's Day, which was never questioned in the New Testament—
    - It was the day Jesus was raised from the dead and the day He poured out the Holy Spirit!
    - It is the day that the Lord has made for us to be glad and rejoice because Jesus, the rejected stone of the living temple was exalted on that day to be the chief cornerstone when He was raised from the dead.

2. Another very common corporate sin is theft.

- We see Christian nations, even very wealthy ones, going into massive debt!
  - This is very wicked because the present generation is spending money and leaving the bill for our children to pay!
  - Nobody thinks much about this being a terrible crime against the next generation.

3. Another government kind of thing is that we have changed our view of the civil magistrate.

- The Bible tells us that the most important characteristic of a leader is that they fear God. They are to follow His law, not do whatever the people want or what they think best.
    - If Christ is not their master, who is?
    - Either He is Lord of the nations or somebody else is.
      - Should our greatest desire not be to have leaders who see themselves as being under God? Others are usually ruled by bribes.
4. In the church, there is the sin of engaging in worship that was not instituted by the LORD has been very common—almost the norm, even though God spoke against it.
- He spoke against it, but He also tolerated it.
  - This sin was almost universally practiced in the Old Testament during the kingdom years—where altars were set up at the high places even though God had said only at Jerusalem were sacrifices to be offered...
    - Traditions of men were added and what God commanded was neglected, even though in Deut 12:32, He plainly said not to this, summarising with these words at the end of the chapter: **“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**
      - In the NT times, we have seen how things like praying to the saints or creating holy days that God did not establish have been the rule rather than the exception. For seven centuries, musical instruments were not used in NT worship, and even by the time of Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he could say of the church that “We do not use instruments lest we Judaize,” (they were for the OT temple worship, but never commanded for the NT), but now almost everyone uses them.
- C. There are also many sins that affect us more personally that we think little of practicing.
1. Gluttony and excess of wine or even use of narcotics and prescription drugs that are used in ungodly ways.
    - I hear of professing Christians getting drunk or high—things that you do before you are converted according to the New Testament, not after!
  2. Increasingly, sexual sins are looked at as harmless—pornography is widespread, filthy jokes are common among so-called believers; immodest clothing is common. (Col 3:5.)
  3. People will neglect daily worship in their homes and public worship and think little of it—they are like the families of the Gentiles that Jeremiah talks about in Jer 10:25 that do not call on the name of the LORD.
  4. Children are not restrained, but allowed to dishonour their parents—to speak disrespectfully and even to curse their parents—a capital offense in the OT! (Eph 6:1-4.)
  5. And indeed, Christians will throw out curses as if they are in the place of God and can casually curse whatever they want—little is thought of it!
  6. We indulge in anxiety and worry as if it is acceptable before God who commands us to be anxious for nothing, but to give all to Him in prayer. (Phil 4:6)

7. We will grumble like Israel did in the wilderness and suppose that God won't care. (Phil 2:14.)
8. Breaking up marriages is another. Divorce is becoming increasingly common and few churches will discipline those who do it when they do not have grounds.
  - If they church members won't repent of this sin, they should be declared to be unbelievers and put out of the church. Christians don't break marriage covenants and not repent.
9. The truth is, there is a general lack of the fear and love of God. We act like no sin is a big deal.

**II. It is true that with polygamy and many 'acceptable' sins, the prohibition of these sins in scripture and consequence seems gentle.**

**A. Consider how polygamy is prohibited in scripture.**

1. It is prohibited because it goes against God's institution of marriage, which Jesus spoke about in Matthew 19 as that which God established at creation when Eve was brought to Adam.
  - The institution is that a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh.
    - It is not that three or four become one flesh, but two.
    - Jesus used that to speak against divorce, which was common in His day, saying that what God has joined no one should tear apart, but the original institution also speaks against polygamy.
2. God also told kings specifically that they were not to multiply wives (Dt 17:17).
  - Yet, because the nations did this, the OT kings did it too. It was acceptable to them not because God said so, but because that was the popular opinion.
    - And, as I have pointed out, God seems to have tolerated it in David and others.
3. God did send prophets to rebuke those who were doing it the way He did with other sins such as when David committed adultery.
  - Polygamy seems to be rarely mentioned when God speaks of man he approves of overall and mentions a few flaws such as allowing worship at the high places.
    - So it appears that you can commit these sins with out much consequence.

**B. Many of the sins that I named that are common in our day have also been tolerated by God—at least so it would seem.**

1. Like with polygamy, you can find a prohibition or commandment given here and there in the word, but when you see Christians doing these things—you figure it must be okay.
  - They ignore the Sabbath, playing sports, working, whatever—they go on, it seems, and little trouble comes their way and few think the worse of them.
2. Sexual sins are laughed at, drunkenness is looked as having fun with your friends.
  - This ought not to be—but they still go to church and talk about God.

3. Churches practice idolatry, and they seem to grow and flourish—sometimes even more when they engage in practices that are not strictly what God has said.
  - As I pointed out last week, when Israel worshipped the golden calf, they were more fired up than ever—indeed, for none other than Jehovah, the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt.
  - But in that case, He did denounce them strongly, killing many of them and refusing to go with them to the promised land until Moses interceded.
    - Yet, the lesson was not remembered—idolatry gradually crept in and became dominant, just as it has in the church over the centuries, and when it did, God did not do anything immediately.
  - Our goal must be to worship God only as He commands without adding or taking away anything.
    - That is what pleases Him. All else is idolatry.
    - Just because many do it and get away with it does not make it right.

**III. But now I want to show you that there are more consequences to ‘acceptable’ sins than we might think. Even though God does not immediately come down on sins that seem to be acceptable—there are significant consequences.**

A. Let’s start with our model. Polygamy.

1. I suppose it looked pretty appealing to the flesh—a rich man with several beautiful wives to choose between each day.
  - We like to eat a variety of foods, why not enjoy a variety of wives?
  - What could go wrong?
2. But in fact we see that it did not go so well.
  - You can’t find one example of a happy polygamist family in the Bible.
  - Polygamy brought grief and heartache, rivalry, division, even murder and rape within families that practiced it.
    - Think of Abraham with the division between Sarah and Hagar;
    - Jacob with the division between his sons, depriving him of Joseph for so many years—his son Reuben had sex with one of his dad’s other wives—his wives were often quarreling and complaining—what would you expect?
      - What is the relationship between the two wives supposed to be?
      - They are people and yet they are treated like commodities.
    - What sorrows David knew! His son raped his half-sister, which led her brother to retaliate and kill the offender. There were contentings for the throne.
  - And what about David’s adultery with Bathsheba?
    - That was directly rebuked, but here is a question to ponder.
    - Did David commit that sin because he had indulged his lust to have more than one woman in marriage? In other words, he had an area of sin in his life that was not mortified or put to death.
      - This set the ground for a far more serious offense.

3. The truth is that polygamy led to severe national calamities and to church-wide apostasy—at least it was a major contributor.
    - Solomon got into idolatry by marrying pagan wives.
      - Pagan women had pagan sons—some of them became kings in Israel and led the nation astray. The nation ended up with a destroyed temple and city in captivity in Babylon.
    - In Nehemiah and Ezra we see why polygamy was curbed by the exile.
      - They sharply rebuked those who were starting to marry pagan wives.
      - When the practice got started, Nehemiah said in 13:26: **“Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin.”**
        - He commanded them to divorce these women. Serious action was taken because he recognised that it had serious consequences for the nation.
- B. So let’s think about how God is still faithful to teach us even when He does not deal directly and decisively with our sin right away, but seems almost to accept it.
1. His goal is to disciple His whole church through the ages.
    - One of the main lessons He wants us to learn for eternity is that ruin comes when we deviate from what He has appointed and commanded.
    - Just because lots of people are doing something and we don’t see any immediate consequences does not mean the thing is harmless!
      - It never is. Eve ate the fruit and it seemed to go fine—was it not a little thing? So Adam ate it too.
      - That is what we do in our folly. Instead of listening and going by what God says, we look to see what other people are doing and decide that it must be okay.
      - God, in this world, is teaching us that it is *never* okay to go against Him—at all—in any way.
  2. He is not in a hurry to teach us.
    - Slow lessons can be very powerful.
      - Our society is undergoing ruin because of our greed that causes us to steal from our children—ever increasing our debt and passing the bill to them.
      - We are undergoing ruin because of sexual promiscuity, drugs, and misuse of alcohol—drunkenness.
        - We become indolent, we drop out, we slack off, we lose interest, we break up our families.
        - We kid ourselves that we are getting on fine, but we drink and indulge ourselves to utter destruction.
  3. Take pornography as another example.
    - Occasional porn leads to frequent porn, frequent porn leads to harder porn, harder porn leads to other deviant sins such as child porn or homosexuality.

- Sometimes, it may not go down the slippery slope so far—but what it does do is take a man’s heart away from his home.
- He thinks he is handling it, but he loses his family.
  - He is more engaged thinking about his porn than he is addressing the needs of his children and his wife.
  - They go astray and he wonders why.

C. Here is a good illustration about the Lord’s Day.

1. We have some friends in our neighbourhood who were some of the original families.
  - We knew the elderly grandmother—she was a solid Christian who observed the Lord’s Day?
  - Her children observed the Lord’s Day and went to church, but they agreed to let their children play sports on Sunday—missing church sometimes.
  - I remember speaking to one of these children of the matriarch when they learned that our children did not play sports on Sunday.
    - That’s when they told us of their mother, but they commented that now that their own children have grown up, most of them don’t go to church at all.
    - They commented that everyone else was doing it and they did not want their children to be left out—it seemed harmless at the time.
  - Is their story not the story of what has happened across Canada?
    - Is this not shown in the stats, where we used to be almost all Christian and majority active Christian, and now there are half or so who are even nominal Christian and far less who are active?
      - And how many among these actually keep the Lord’s Day. Which way are we headed?
      - I am happy to say that there has been some turning back to the Lord since Covid, but many of these are not as serious about their faith as they ought to be.
2. God may have to bring us to utter ruin before we will learn that doing what He wants is important.
  - Talk to those from churches that have given themselves over to idolatry over the centuries.
    - How few there are who understand the gospel of our salvation.
    - They trust in their rituals, and, like Israel, that they are numbered among those who are called Christian rather than that they are trusting in Christ.
      - What did Paul say in Romans 9:6-8: **For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, <sup>7</sup> nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” <sup>8</sup> That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.**

**Conclusion**

So where do we need to go with all of this?

- We need to go to Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.
- We need to come and bow afresh to Him, renewing our commitment to deny ourselves and follow Him instead of following the crowd.
  - We can do nothing without His grace.
  - We come to Him for forgiveness and we come to Him for cleansing and we come to Him for a new life of obedience.
- In Matthew 7:13-14, He warns us not to follow the crowd but Him.
  - He says: **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”**
  - We say, “No, I don’t want to be too zealous. My way is more of a middle way.”
    - A middle way? A half following of Jesus?
    - If there are two ways, the narrow way leading to life and the broad way leading to destruction, where is the middle?
      - It seems to me that the middle is part of the broad way that leads to destruction where the crowd goes.
        - You have the narrow way to life, and then you have the way of open rebellion at the other extreme and then you have middle.
          - Is the middle part of the narrow way, or is it part of the broad way that leads to destruction?
          - Is the middle where the few go, or where the many go?
            - The answer is clear.
            - May the Lord have mercy on us.