

Curbing Divorce in Christian Marriages: A Panacea for Sustainability of the Home

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Abstract

This study opined that marriage has a good beginning when two partners enter into it, with a determination to make it permanent and meaningful. In the past, divorce is not rampant especially in Yoruba land because of the marriage custom attached to the union of families. However, the rate of divorces has increased due to the importation of new culture and custom from the Western World. It was observed that in those days, it is the duty of the elders to settle marital problem especially the issue of divorce that is why the use of popular Yoruba proverb “Agbagba to je obi Epera yin jo” (meaning all the elders who taste a piece of kolanut call each other together) is common when settling marital problems. The effect on Christian home is not palatable. Hence, divorce is not an option, the care giver needs to place before the couples who are in crises, but how they can re commit themselves to the marriage. Divorce is reality of today's world and there is great need for compassion, understanding and healing on the part of the church leaders (Caregivers).

Keywords: *Curbing, Divorce, Christian Marriages, Panacea, Sustainability, Home*

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Background to the Study

Marriage has a good beginning when two partners enter into it, with a determination to make it permanent and meaningful. In the past, divorce is not rampant especially in Yoruba land because of the marriage custom attached to the union of families. But nowadays, the rate of divorces is increasing day by day due to the importation of the new culture and custom from the Western World. In those days, it is the duty of the elders to settle marital problem especially the issue of divorce that is why the use of popular Yoruba proverb “Agbagba to je obi Epera yin jo (meaning all the elders who taste a piece of kolanut call each other together) is common when settling marital problems. Today the custom is going down gradually and people prefer going to court to going to the elders. It is therefore the focus of this paper to look at the issue of divorce from causes, African and theological perspective, the effects and pastoral care and counseling. The writer will define some of the operative terms for the purpose of clarity.

Divorce:

Ojemola quoting Webster's seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines divorce as to leave one's husband; a legal dissolution of marriage.” As a verb, it means to get rid of one's spouse by divorcee, to dissolve the marriage contract between husband and wife; to separate. To the writer divorce is legal means of dissolving a legally recognized union of marriage based on genuine reasons, after which both return to their single status as before. Counseling: Wendel (1989:380) quoting American Heritage Dictionary defines counseling as an exchange of opinions and ideas, discussion, advice or guidance; a deliberate resolution. Later Wendel on his own opined that counseling is a process by which a person deliberates with himself through the sensitive understanding and skilled responses of another in a deeply relationship. The writer will adopt this simple definition of counseling as a means of helping others to help themselves.

Theological Perspective of Divorce

To do justice to this aspect the following will be considered, God's view as recorded in both Old and New Testaments and the human understanding and arrangement as influenced by culture and environment.

To start with, it is 'pertinent to state here that divorce found existence in the institution of marriage. This is to say that without marriage, there can never be anything called divorce. The reason being that marriage is a social institution in which a man is united with a woman in a special form of mutual dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family. It is a contract between a man and a woman which existed since ancient times as a social practice entered into through a public act. It reflects the purpose, character and customs of the society in which it is found. (Encarta, 2005).

Having known that, dissolution as it is known is a legislatively created, judicially administered process that legally terminates a marriage no longer considered viable by one or both of the spouses, and that permits both to remarry (Encarta). Until the divorce reform movement of the 1970s began to have impact, the legal doctrines governing divorce could be understood only by reviewing the long history of English divorce, which was dominated by concepts of canon law.

Without mincing words, from biblical point of view, it is a known fact that creator God that instituted marriage made it for life. From God's perspective marriage is indissoluble (Gen. 2). The Roman Catholic adherents hold this view till date. (Retlef 93).

This could be supported with the incidence that happened in the Garden of Eden. As it is held that Eve caused Adam to disobey God's order pertaining the eating of the forbidden fruit, as God judged them, he did not separate them but allowed them to be or do you think it would be too much for God to make available to Adam another woman? No; In spite of what Eve did and the far-reaching effect on human kind, the All-wise creator did not separate them (Gen. 3) Perhaps He understood that, it takes two to tangle and most importantly, he could not go against his original intention for bringing them together. Adam and Eve, the first couple remained married for life. The creator, initiated, arranged, sustained and maintained the marriage.

In addition, other scriptural passages buttressed the fact that God was consistent in his view against divorce. In Malachi 2:14-16 and Matthew 19:3-9, God sees divorce as wrong because it is the breaking of a binding commitment, that is, one or both spouses have made a conscious decision to be unfaithful. Marriage was God's idea from the beginning of creation. He created Adam and Eve as distinct individuals and at the same time, he created a special relationship between them in which the two became one person in spirit. (Genesis 2:24). Jesus, Christ stressed the fact that divorce was human's arrangement. It was never in God's plan. With forgiveness and openness to adjust and determination to succeed marriage is for life. However, it is important to recognize that divorce is human tendency that is frowned at in both, the Old and New Testament times.

In the ancient time, the continuations of marriage depend largely on the caprice of the husband. He could order her out of his home at any point in time, and if she marries someone else, the first husband could insist that she was still his wife and may forcibly take her from her second husband. This made wife to be victim in the marriage relationship. That was the practice of pagan people who lived in the wilderness around Israel.

Based on the proximity, Israel adopted their approach to divorce. The legislation in the law book-Deuteronomy was to regulate the practice as Moses found them. Moses did not introduce divorce but introduced a set of control to bring order to a chaotic and hurtful situation. The legislation aimed at providing practical and moral protection for the woman from a hardhearted husband who could injure her or drag her away from a position of relative happiness and security because he considered her as his own personal property.

The regulation provided the woman the needed moral and practical protection from a brutish husband and a legal ground for the second marriage as a legitimate relationship not merely a live-in-one. This is because, it provided a proof that the first marriage, has ended and protect the second marriage, so that the first husband could not interfere with it. Through divorce, the socially disadvantaged in the society were cared for which also underscore the dignity of womanhood. The provision of divorce offered woman a practical protection in that, there had

to be adequate ground for divorce. Man can no longer throw out his wife on a whim or a fancy. The law does 'not force man to divorce but it was an option which he may choose instead of maltreating the woman.

However, in spite of the fact that the law grants divorce, it does not accord divorce any sort of status. This is to buttress the fact that God had no provision for it. He hates the pain of divorce as well as the sin that causes it. This is to say that the law provides for divorce just as motor insurance provides for car theft, fire extinguisher for fire, or first aid for injuries. The Old Testament law is not saying go and get divorce. It says divorce should not happen but if it does, deal with it this way.

The New Testament record made it plain that Jesus reiterated what was the original plan of God concerning marriage. Jesus addressed the issue of divorce against the Jewish views on divorce. The Jewish teaching on divorce was set out in "Mishmash" which was compiled in A D 200 but reflected the teaching of earlier centuries. There used to be three different schools. The Shammai, Hille and Akiba (Retief 102). The Shammai's school says "A man must not divorce his wife unless he found unchastely in her", The Hillel's says, "He may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him.

While Rabbi Akiba (2010:23) opined that, man can divorce his wife, if he found another fairer than she. These three schools were the most prominent ancient rabbis who exerted tremendous influence in their day, especially in their view of marriage and Interpretation of the Law of Moses. These wrong interpretations caused a great deal of mischief and: Jesus had to address it. Shammai allowed no divorce except for unfaithfulness. Hillel permitted divorce for trivial offences while Akiba went further and allowed the husband to divorce his wife for no reason whatever. If the husband fancied someone else was a sufficient ground for divorce.

Against this background Jesus was questioned by the Pharisee (Matthew 19:3:12). It was based especially on the teaching of Rabbis Hillel and Akiba as well as their exegesis of Deuteronomy 24. Not on the teaching of Moses. The rabbis had explained away the practical and moral protection God had given the wife under this law and reduced it to divorce at the whim of the man (Mark 7:13)

Jesus took his questioner back beyond the Law of Moses to God's original plan. He quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to support his view. This revealed that Marriage is part and parcel of God's creation ordinance. Man and woman were created with the desire to marry, the implicit mandate to do so and ability to love one's partner for life. Jesus' principles of marriage revolve round leaving, cleaving, and loving. According to Him, the commitment between husband and wife should be like glue. It is not only physical but social and spiritual, that is to say, all other aspect of living now take place with the spouse as frame of reference. The two whole lives are joined together.

This teaching presupposed that Jesus opposed divorce in all his teachings though he is compassionate and cared for those who are victim of divorce. Hillel and Akiba did not express

the mind of the Initiator and Sustainer of marriage nor that of Jesus the Christ, and Saviour of the whole world. Also, Christians have divided opinions on the issues of divorce ranging from strong feeling that a divorced person cannot remarry without committing adultery to an equally strong feeling that redemption through Jesus Christ embraces the woundedness of divorce and thus allows a new start of life. Somewhere, in between is a recognition of the practicality of remarriage for single parents who are struggling to cope with earning a living and raising children without a mate.

In essence, a biblical perspective of divorce may be more profitable when we focus on how to prevent it rather than trying to define it and its consequences. The consequences is destructive on each divorced person and any child involved. Jesus condemned the immorality and low view of marriage that prevailed in looking for excuse to get rid of partner in order to take another which invariably constitutes a legalized form of adultery. Paul the apostle opined that remarriage and reconciliation are two possibilities (ward 179) in the case of divorce. Those involved would have to choose. Before divorce, attempt at meaningful reconciliation must be made and remarriage must not be rush without resolving the issues that could have contributed to the breakdown of the first (Retief 155).

African Perspective of Divorce

Culturally, divorce was not prominently known in Africa or by African. Initially it was as a result of civilization that such concept entered into our vocabulary. O'Donovan (1996:292) is of opinion that divorce is foreign invention to Africans that was inculcated into our culture through civilization. He goes further that the introduction of such mal-emotional idea of terminating already established marriage is commonly learnt through watching of foreign movies, blue films and other sexual immorality videos. Consciously or unconsciously these practices became rooted in Africa.

There are so many cultural practices; taboos and adages that teach African that divorce of already established marriage is forbidden as far as Africa is concerned. Cultural involvement of parent of both sides in marriage serves as corrective' measure to disallow divorce in whatever marriage done in African's way. In this regard, African believes that there is no permanent separation that can lead to divorce unless there are no responsible elders from both sides. Reasons being that, Africans don't give their daughter to just anybody for marriage, but to the entire family. This is in line with an adage of old which says, "Omokomo se e feana kana nikoseni". No matters how way ward a son or daughter is, he or she can still be married or be given to marry but only bad in laws cannot be condoled.

Again, parents versus parents' type of negotiation that is culturally practiced is another way of eradicating separation that can lead to divorce in Africa. This is also in line with another adage of old that say, "Enyinagbaagbati e je ela obi E peara yin jo" The elders that did the negotiation initially should summon themselves to settle the misunderstanding before it would get out of control.

In another perspective, Africans don't believe in divorce at all, once children are involved. From time to time the woman can come and visit her child at will or when the child grows s/he can bring the mother back home. Shaw is of opinion that if at all there is a divorce it is either caused or fuelled by the parent or the woman herself. (www:/journals.cambridge.org/). In order words, where no child is involved, such woman is regarded as an on and off visiting woman. If she goes no one would care to settle the misunderstanding to give room for the man to marry another woman.

Causes of Divorce

Divorce has become a common experience both among Christians and non-Christians. There are so many factors that affect couples' decisions to divorce today. For example, factors that bind marriage and family together may include legal, social, moral and the spouse's interdependence. These same factors can also lead to divorce if they are removed from marriage. There is no one cause of divorce because every marriage is different. Although marriage causes divorce, each divorce comes because of a unique combination of causes and circumstances. When influences such as desertion or immature attitudes are not resolved in marriage, divorce is more likely to come in. Of all influences that can make couples to divorce, Collins (1988:454) maintains that two biblically sanctioned reasons for divorce are sexual unfaithfulness and sanction. Personal and interpersonal factors are often cited as causes of divorce. Difficult areas such as money, sexual relations, relatives, and alcoholism are some other factors. According to Rodney Hunter, among these interpersonal factors are disagreements about goals and expectations as individuals and as a couple and the inability to solve conflicts constructively ... (297). Other influences sometimes motivate spouses to initiate divorce action.

Decreased economic interdependence is a major factor today. Since couples and family members no longer need each other for basic needs, they are free to divorce (Lamanna and Riedmann 1985, 500). The more marriage does not offer practical benefits, economic interdependence, divorce can occur. Another factor on why couples divorce is the cultural values and attitudes. The cultural constraints that once kept unhappy partners from separating operate less strongly today. The transition from traditional to modern society has cause increased divorce rate.

Growing apart as interest, goal change and loss of communication can result to divorce. Immediately there is gap in communication, the couples begin to step back because they will not be able understand each other. Another important factor is high expectations. According to Olson and DeFrain, (522) the stress and strains of living together are simple too difficult for many couples. If such stress and strains continue, couples are free to divorce. Furthermore, arguments over sex can lead to infidelity and the result may be divorce. If there is no sexual fulfillment, marriage becomes boring and the relationship with the spouse becomes difficult and unsatisfying Diana and Garland claim that the sexual relationship-between partners can easily become a source of trouble (97) that can end in divorce. Infidelity results when another person is seen as being a much better partner. Although many people; seek solace outside marriage for many reasons, infidelity can mean the end of the relationship (522).

One of the most common factors for divorce is devitalized (bumed out) marriage because the couple is no longer in love (Olson and DeFrain 1994:523). Along with is depression because of lack of love and insecurity in marriage. The husband or the wife may have psychological problems. Additionally, alcohol or drugs abuse may cause divorce. There is a link between physical abuse and drug abuse because it is most likely for a couple who abuses drug and engages in excessive drinking to be an abuser. Very importantly, in-law relationship may be a hindrance and can lead to divorce. Lamanna and Riedmann (1983:500) agree that the in-law relationship may be marred as parents are resentful towards their child's marital partners for having brought about a marriage they did not want or viewed as too early. An unsatisfied sexual life is often associated with divorce in marriage. Whatever may be the causes for divorce, it means that everyone involved must adjust to a new way of living.

Effect of Divorce

Divorce can affect people physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Often it leads to emotional upheaval, irrational decisions, and interpersonal tensions. It affects the two people involved, but its influence can extend to children, parents other family members fellow employee's friends, neighbor, and people in the church. (Collins 1972, 456). Each divorce is unique but some common patterns as compels being too separate have been noticed by counselors. These include the following.

Unhappiness: This is communicated indirectly but there may be no mention of separation because the initiator is still pondering on the idea and does not want to arouse arguments or possible retaliation. As time passes, the signals get bolder, the discontent is expressed more openly, and sometimes the initiator tries to provoke the other partner into declaring first that the marriage is over. Often however, it is the initiator who announces the break. The spouse who hears the news may be shocked and deeply hurt, but the initiator has had time to think about the divorce and to find some security elsewhere (456). Deep Scars: These results from the stress of passing through tensions and adjustment difficulties that lead to an emotional divorce. The deep scars are left in the form of depression, low self-esteem, anger, guilt or self-doubt leading to (insecurity) especially in the partner who wants the marriage (456).

Mourning: Divorce almost always involves periods of mourning. This includes positive morning (which involves the experience of remembering the good and happy times in the marriage), negative mourning (which involves the experience of confusion or self-pity), and assembling the pieces (slowly, picking up the demands of life and learning to live without a mate) (smoke 18). In each of the stages, the following may be observed: emotional, behavioural, social, and spiritual effects of the divorce.

Emotional Effects: From the stages, it can be seen that divorce is accompanied by an almost endless range of emotions including anxiety, guilt, fear, sadness, depression (sometimes accompanied by thoughts of suicide), anger, bitterness, and frustration. Most couples experience periods of indecision, confusion, or vacillation, but sometimes there is a sense of hyper alertness, as if the person is waiting expectantly for something else to go wrong. The body of course cannot maintain a continuing state of tension and vigilance, so psychosoma

illness often follows. Divorce involves the loss of a love and death of a relationship. It is valid therefore to think of divorce as a grief reaction seem with all of the emotions that grieving involves. Like all grief reactions. the pain Seems greater at Christmas. Thanksgiving, anniversaries. and other special] times of the year” (Collins, 1972:457).

Behavioural Effects: Divorce affects how one feels, but it is influences what one does. Routine activities must continue, but they are continued without the help of a matte if there are children, the divorced must adjust to becoming a single parent either living apart from the children or with the children present in one-parent family. Often the divorced parent must cope with the behavioural, academic, and emotional effects of the divorce on the children. Pre occupied with problems like these, one's work often suffers. Quality and quantity of output may decline, efficiency drops, and sometimes there is high accident proneness (457).

Social Effects: It's probably true that no-one ever gets divorced alone (Vigevemo, 1987:36) when a marriage breaks up, the couple Is affected and so are: Family Members: Including children (especially boys) (Buie 32), parents and other relatives whose reactions range from shock, rejection, rage, and fear to support and encourage. Divorce among many other ways affect the children. Allies such as personal friends, some fellow church members or coworkers, and supportive relatives who encourage but sometimes complicate the situation with their advice and-opinions. Critics: (some of whom may be in one's church or family) who reject, condemn, blame, and sometimes treat divorced persons judgmentally. Married Friends: some of whom feel threatened and many who are not sure how to react in the presence of the newly divorced person other single people, including many who may be understanding, some who are critical. (Collins, 1972, 458). Divorced people often experience loneliness, insecurity, confusion about whether they should date or remarry, and concerns about identity or self-confidence. Most struggle with the issues of sex and self-control (Weiss, 1975:309).

Spiritual Effects” How does all of this affect the Christian's spiritual life? As with any crisis, divorce can pull some people closer to Christ for strength and guidance. Others may get angry at God and spiritually rebellious, especially if there is rejection and criticism from the church. More common, perhaps, is the tendency to withdraw spiritually, worship becomes less important, personal times of prayer and Bible Study becomes less frequent, and in the midst of all these other pressures there is a gradual drifting away or letting go of spiritual interests and activities (Collins, 1975:458).

Pastor Care and Counseling in Divorce Situation

As already highlighted above that God consummates marriage Gen2:24, why then do we creatures break God's covenant which is inseparable (Matt 19: 6), one flesh these (Lev. 18:6). On a flimsy reason as listed above (see causes of divorce. To reduce, if not eradicated this ugly scenario, the pastors, care givers, marriage counselors' teachers, parents have an uncompromised task. Clark and Rakestraw, (1974: 225) opine that “divorce is ruinous and tragic”. So the counselors must be on their toes to salvage marriage from collapsing. Adams says that “the church must not sit on the fence, for the difference the church makes now is the difference these people will make in the church later” (108). That is to say it is the duty of the

church to do were not party to the divorce, the extended families, etc. caring is expected from the community of faith, particularly the clergy. Forgiveness should be our watchword; reconciliation may follow through the work of prayer and the intervention of the counselor or comforter that is the Holy Spirit. The pastor must take his time to intervene (Lk. 15:4). The hurting individual's needs support. The clergy, youth group, advisors, counselors and caring individual to come to the children needs spending time with these children's shows that the church and her organs care. But "must not badmouth any of the spouses" (Adams, 1999:108). All must be honest in their counseling; the clergy is not there to replace the father or the mother but to give honest counseling. Where stepfamily resulted, the children faced the question of loyalty confusion, resentment and worries. The care giver, teaches the value and virtues of forgiveness, respect, dutifulness that they are unique and important personalities and that there is hope for future, that the world has not come to an end.

Isaac, (1926:464) opines that "the counselor should remind the counselees that God wants the best for His children". He forgives those who confess and guide those who want His leading. Kjesbo offers these suggestions for the church on the children of the divorced, that the church should "provide support ministry. Provide specialized programmes for these children with age grade. Provide prayer partners for children and parents. Connect newly divorces. Adapt the church programmes to be friendlier to the divorced children. Do everything to erase the stigma that children of divorce are from broken homes. Offer unconditional love and accept the children. Affirm the church as the family of God, create relationships within the church which provide family like connections for these children."

Biblical Response: There is none or very scanty information on how to handle issue of divorce because this was manmade not God's (Matt 19:6). This is why provision was faintly made for those who suffered physical, mental or spiritual grieves from divorce. Olson and Leonard opine that, we could adapt what is found in James 1:27, which is for the orphans and the widows for the children and spouses of divorce respectively.

Would it be too farfetched to suspect that not only widows but all attempting to rear children without a spouse's partnership might be included in this sense" (Olson and Leonard 1995:54). In the writer's view, there is not much objection to this assertion, more importantly we've said above that the difference the church makes now, will be the difference these people will make in the church later. Similarly, God loves sinners; it's the sins that God hates. Even the children were not part of the decision to divorce. Therefore, they must be taking care of.

Conclusion

Divorce is not an option, the care giver needs to place before the couples who are in crises, but how they can re commit themselves to the marriage. Divorce is reality of today's world and there is great need for compassion, understanding and healing on the part of the church leaders (Caregivers). Each person has his/her own story. You had the opportunity to minister to the divorcees and their children and to promote stability and healing in their lives. The life of our members are very important, especially in crisis situation like divorce, God will grant us understanding of how to meet people where they are and how to effectively bring healing to their hurts.

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