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SANCTITY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND THE SECURITY OF CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: UTILIZING MARK 10:2-12 AS A PARADIGM

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Abstract

The study present an assessment of Mark 10:2-12 as a premise for the study of the sanctity of marriage and security of children in Nigeria. The objectives of this work were to re-examine the issue of marriage, divorce, re-marriage and the effects it has on children. A study of Mark 10:2-12 was done for clarity of the application and implications of terminologies that are related to permanency in Christian marriage. Views of Biblical Scholars on Mark 10:2-12 were explored because of the importance it attached to the work. Methods employed include historical, narrative and sociological. The historical method helped the reconstruction of the place of divorce and re-marriage in Christianity. The narrative method made a comprehensive examination of the contents of the texts under consideration easy to assimilate, the sociological method was important in order to understand the effects of divorce and remarriage on the children and the society. The major findings were; re-marriage is unbiblical as divorce should not occur in the first place. The honour and sanctity of marriage are under constant attack in Nigeria today; evidenced by the high rate of divorce that is common, and its repercussions reverberate through childhood into adulthood. In conclusion, Christians who fail to uphold the sanctity of marriage through divorce and re-marriage commit adultery.

Keywords: Sanctity, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Introduction

The history of Christianity contains divergent views and interpretations regarding the subject of marriage and divorce. Man's sincere theologians, counsellors, and ministers have agonised laboriously over this subject, yet have been unable to come to a common understanding. Value systems constantly seem to change and divorce runs rampant, even in the church. The scripture is clear as to God's original design for marriage: i.e. that a man and a woman be united in a monogamous life-long relationship. While we recognise that the very foundation of this divine institution has been attacked and marred since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, it is still incumbent on us to strive for and uphold God's original design. However, we also recognise that we are working from a fallen state trying to achieve God's purpose. We are commissioned to minister to all without prejudice. As such then, the church must continue to uphold this principle, yet accept the challenge of ministering God's grace in a fallen world.

Conceptualizing Marriage

Marriage is simply defined by Roy as "The God-appointed and legitimate union of man and woman."¹ Marriage exists to bring a man and a woman together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces. In Nigeria today, three types of marriage exist namely religious, civil and traditional marriages. A couple may decide to take part in one or all of these. This study is limited to Biblical Christian marriage and family.

Marriage is not man's invention. It is not simply a social contract or an arrangement of convenience. It is a gift from God for the blessing of men, women and children and for the good of the society. It was God who said it was not good for the man to be alone and therefore created the woman and so conducted the first marriage ceremony in Genesis to reflect the lineage of the Godhead (Gen. 1:26-28). These two verses teach that marriage is God's idea, not something humans developed. (Gen. 2:18) Marriage is part of God's original creation and is "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Conceptualizing Sanctity of Marriage

The sanctity of marriage means that marriage is spiritual and sacred. It should be permanent and reserved exclusively for couples that truly love each other. However, in the society today, the honour and sanctity of marriage are under attack. Divorce has become more common and has its repercussions that reverberate through childhood and into adulthood. Divorce is acceptable and easy to implement. Divorce is the result of a hard or unforgiving heart and can be rationalised by the mind as the "right thing" to do. In today's society, divorce is viewed as a very common and often used as a way of running away from problems or legally leaving one's spouse for another. The Nigerian culture of today is not too different from the Jewish society of the first century where divorce and remarriage were rampant.² Fornication and adultery were barely frowned at but Christianity offers a true contrast of standard regarding morality through clear and unequivocal teaching. The Christian understanding on divorce is likewise based on the scripture which does not give any permission for it. "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and the two shall be but one flesh. So then they are no more two but one flesh. What God has joined together let no man separate (MK 10:6-9). Having said this, we shall go on to examine what the Old Testament says concerning divorce and marriage.

Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament

Divorce did not begin with the children of Israel. When Moses presented the laws for governing divorce in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4, God did not permit him to do so in order to give approval for divorce. These laws were simply given to regulate

a practice that already existed and was a familiar custom throughout the known world. Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 is primarily concerned with remarriage. Tenny opines that "a twice married woman is forbidden after the death or divorce of her second husband to return to her first husband. The reason for this prohibition is obscure". This law mentions two different grounds for divorce, the first husband divorces her because of 'something indecent', while second because he 'dislikes' her. 'Something indecent' may suggest sexual misconduct. Though, adultery, if caught in the act, could be punished by death, this was not mandatory (Cf. Prov 6:29-35), so something indecent may cover adultery as well as other sexual acts.

In the case of divorce, several things must be kept in mind when studying the Old Testament Scriptures. First of all, God sees the marriage bond as being holy. Secondly, because of God's declaration, the marriage bond is to be a lifetime commitment. It must be viewed as a permanent commitment and not as a temporary arrangement. However, because of the "hardness of the heart," Moses provided a way to protect those who were victimised by the sinfulness of another person's heart. We must focus on the sacredness of the marriage bond instead of dwelling so much on divorce. Divorce should never be elevated as being more sinful than other acts of disobedience to God's Word. On the other hand, it should never be excused as simply a regretful necessity. The truth is that nowhere in the Old Testament is divorce recommended or approved, even though it was allowed in specific situations. It is equally true that God hates divorce just as much as he hates sin in any form. This Old Testament legislation, therefore, affords recognition of the fact that marriage is sometimes broken, although, divorce is not approved, it acknowledges the need for the society (bill of divorcement): it serves to protect the divorced woman and to legislate against cruelty.

In sum, the old testament presupposes the right of divorce, though divorce was allowed, it was discouraged by social convention, law and financial penalty. Both Genesis 2:24 (a man will...be united literally 'stick' to his wife), and the wedding ceremony itself all expresses the hope that marriage will be for life. To be divorced was to fall in social esteem (Prov 30:23). In practice, divorce must have been rare because it was expensive.

Divorce and Remarriage in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, Jesus stressed the seriousness and permanence of marriage, he affirmed the standard for those who wanted to find true fellowship with God. In the Old Testament, there were written rules and consequences that were followed. In the New Testament, Jesus made it plain that God was not interested in people following rules so much as he was interested in their hearts being right. He knew that a person could follow rules and still not be in communion with God.

Divorce and remarriage certainly existed even among God's people, both under the law and under grace: there is no question that these actions were not the

chosen design of God. Paul recognised God's perfect will when it comes to marriage, he said a divorced person should be reconciled or remain unmarried. Paul paraphrases Jesus, teaching that a wife must not separate from her husband, but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Paul evidently understands Jesus to tolerate separation from one's spouse but not remarriage to someone else.

Finally, when Jesus addressed the subject of marriage, He did so as a preventive measure to encourage the Jews to take their marriages more seriously. The Jews understood the high-value God placed on this first and great institution of marriage. Neither the Old nor New Testaments sanction divorce, they simply recognise that divorce was practised among the Israelites and even among the early Christians. According to Matt 5:32 and 19:9, Jesus did allow divorce for *porneia* marital unfaithfulness, unchastity'. The normal meaning of *porneia* and its present context demand that it is understood in a broad way of any sexual offence that are prohibited in the Old Testament law, adultery, incest, homosexuality and the likes: anything that Deut.24:1 might term 'something indecent' should not be understood to refer here just to premarital unchastity, or marriage within forbidden degrees, a wider range of sexual misconduct is in view. The New Testament poses great problems for an age where divorce and remarriage are common places. Whatever stance adapted to remarriage, all can agree that loyalty to Biblical principles demands that Christians, both individually and corporately, should work to maintain existing marriages and offer support and encouragement to those who are divorced. Though, it should be borne in mind that divorce is unbiblical and those who divorce their spouses only to remarry another commit adultery. It is based on this reason that the Gospel of Mark 10:2-12 is carefully examined in this paper.

A brief examination of Mark 10:2-12

Marriage and family are not only the key to a prosperous "today", but a prosperous tomorrow as well because, they are the primary institutions God provided by which man might be fruitful and multiply on this earth (Gen. 2:24) and do so in a manner that leads to spiritually prosperous living. If our society is to remain the structure that has provided shelter, hope and prosperity for a large number of people, it will only do so through strong marriages. In Mark 10:2-12 the author begins with the Pharisees, hoping to test Jesus, ask him about the legality of divorce. The society in which we now live has adopted the same attitude toward the sanctity of marriage. Divorce is rampant and single parenthood is far too common and the children are at the receiving end.

The gospel of Mark 10:2-12 recognises the need for the clear and specific instruction regarding society's attitude toward marriage and divorce. While many reasons could have been advanced for maintaining the sanctity of marriage, the writer goes straight by quoting Jesus that Christians who fail to uphold the sanctity of marriage through divorce and re-marriage commit adultery.

10:2 The Pharisees...asked, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? They cite the Mosaic law allowing a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce (Dt. 24:1-4). Jesus says Moses gave them the commandment because of their "hard" hearts (Mk 10:5) and that God had permitted divorce to be regulated as a way to bring order to the society. But Jesus goes back to Genesis 1:27, 2:24 and 5:2 for His model of marriage, emphasising the covenantal nature of the marriage relationship. This is the basis for a "one flesh" stewardship concept of marriage. Scott Opined that: "the model for the family begins at the very first moment that the family is inaugurated that marriage union represents the "miracle of oneness" that reflect the image of God in the Trinity, the nature of Christ and the mystery of the unity of the church."

We may want to know why the Pharisees asked this question from Jesus. It is argued that they may either want to trap Jesus, and get him arrested by the religious authorities if he forbade divorce and so differed from Moses who allowed it (Deut. 24:1); or they wanted Jesus to take part in an argument between Pharisees who followed Shammai, who taught that divorce was only allowed for adultery and Pharisees who followed Hillel, who taught that there were many reasons why a man could divorce his wife.⁷

10:5 for your hardness of heart he (Moses) wrote you this commandment: as we saw above, a man was allowed to divorce his wife according to the 'law of Moses. Jesus did not here say that Moses was wrong. He taught that at the creation God intended all married people to stay together for life. But he meant that because of the weakness of human nature (hardness of heart) God allowed Moses to permit divorce on condition that the woman was given a certificate.

10:6-8 from the beginning...God made them male and female: from Gen. 1:27 and 2:24.

(a) Marriage and the bringing up of children are in accordance with God's will. This truth was important word for Mark's readers, because many people, including some Christians, were saying that marriage was only for those who could not keep their sexual instincts under control.⁸

(b) God intends husband and wife to stay together for life. (See also 1 Cor 7:10, 11), so all who marry must pay attention to their maker's plan if they want to live happily. No one should marry except with the intention of living with the same partner for life.

10:8 The two shall become one flesh: 'Flesh' means more than 'physical body, the verse means: 'They will be joined in body and mind and spirit. They will be joined together even more closely than any member of the family.'

This verse, like v.9, shows that Jesus had in mind the marriage of one man with one woman. (See also v.7, where the words are 'joined to his wife', not 'to each wife'). He never said 'Thou shall not marry two wives, because it was unnecessary, at the time when he was teaching, the Jews no longer practised polygamy, as they had in the days of Abraham.

10:9 What, therefore, God has joined... let no man put as asunder: By saying this, did Jesus teach that divorce is always wrong? Christians have tried giving different answers to these questions as follows. (1) That this is one of the few rules which Jesus ever gave, and it is, therefore, to be obeyed by all Christians. He deliberately overlooked the teaching of Deut. 24:1 which allowed divorce, although he knew that this would give grave offence to the religious authorities. Some Christians add that unless we regard this as a rule laid down by Jesus and keep it, we are encouraging the breakdown of marriage in the society of today, where fornication and adultery were barely frowned upon. The old foundation of performance and fidelity seem to have eroded away. (2) Jesus was not laying down a rule in v.9 for all Christians for all generations. He affirmed God's original plan by quoting Genesis, thus he gave Christians a standard and an ideal for marriage, but not a rule. We may also note that (a) if Jesus had made a rule against all divorce he would have been openly rejecting the Torah (Deut. 24:1) which he did not do. (b) Jesus taught that people could be forgiven for their failures and be given a second chance. Surely He applied this teaching to failure in marriage. (3) That there is not enough information for us to know that Jesus' teaching on divorce is. The teaching in Matt. 19:9 does not agree with the more severe teaching in Mark 10:11. Also from, Matt. 19:11, it seems that His teaching on marriage was not for all His followers.

Therefore, marital couples whose marriages have broken down altogether need the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and Christian counselling but remember God says He hates divorce in Malachi.

10:11: whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits a Jesus forbade Christians to remarry during the life of their first partner this is quite clear.

10:12, if she divorces her husband: Jesus, in these words puts the man and the woman equally under the law of faithfulness to one another. So He taught something quite different from the laws of Moses. A Christian man who expects

his wife to be faithful to him knows from this verse that she has the right to expect him to be faithful to her. God's purpose for creating Adam and Eve was to be a permanent monogamous marriage; therefore, any misuse of this opportunity in term of adultery distorts the true knowledge of God.

The Theological Implication of Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce is fast increasing in Nigeria and this could either be a good or bad thing. Here is what the bible says about ending your marriage.

There are a lot of reasons why a couple might choose to get divorced in the present day. But, does it mean the bible backs them up? Does the Bible insist that you should persevere through whatever hardship you face in a marriage? See what the bible really preaches below.

1. First of all, no matter what view one takes on the issue of divorce, it is important to remember Malachi 2:16 "I hate divorce says the Lord God of Israel".
2. God realises though that since marriages involve two sinful human beings, divorces are going to occur. In the Old Testament, He laid down some laws in order to protect the rights of divorcees, especially women (Deut 24:1-4). Jesus pointed out that these laws were given because of hardness of people's hearts, not because such laws were God's desire (Matt 19:8)
3. Moses permitted a man to obtain a divorce on just about any grounds. (Deut. 24:1-4).
4. God's perfect will is the preservation of society and future generations by preservation of marriages. God will give anyone great help in sustaining a marriage relationship or in the reconciliation of estranged marriage partners.
5. When adultery has taken place, a divorce can be obtained because adultery has already severed the marriage relationship and divorce is a formal acknowledgement of what has already taken place.
6. The apostle Paul added to the teachings of Jesus, what is called "Pauline privilege". According to this concept, Paul taught if an unbeliever spouse leaves a believer, the believer is not bound to the marriage relationship and is free to remarry.

The Aftermath of Divorce on the Children: Generally speaking, divorce puts children at greater risk for many kinds of problems. However, some children of divorce do not experience those serious problems some children are strong and resilient and have returned to a pretty, normal life after a few years.. Children in a high-conflict marriage situation generally are better off if their parents decide to

divorce compared to children whose parents stay married and continue to experience high levels of conflict. Children in low-conflict marriage situations, however, generally do worse when their parents' divorce compared to children whose parents stay married and keep trying to work things out.¹⁰ Children are developing physically, socially, emotionally, educationally, morally, and spiritually; research shows that divorce can affect children in each of these developmental areas. In Thomas opinion in adulthood, children of divorce are 2-3 times more likely to experience a divorce compared to children who did not experience a divorce growing up.¹¹ Until recently, not much research was done on this question and there is still much to be discovered in this area. A recent national study compared young adults who grew up with divorced families considered themselves spiritually about as often as those from intact families, but they were less likely to consider themselves to be religious. They attended church less often than those whose parents did not divorce.

One possible reason for a decline in these children's religious behaviour could be the disruption in family church attendance as a result of divorce. Those in divorce families attended church less regularly and felt less encouragement from their parents to practice a religious faith.

Another reason for their decline in the religious activity of children of divorce could be that they feel a lack of compassion from people in the church they attend. Also, perhaps it is more difficult for children of divorce to believe in a caring God because of the lack of trust and anger they have had toward their parents. Though some have a hard time with faith and belonging to a particular religion or congregation, there are also some who turn to God for comfort. In Wallerstein opinion, about four in ten children of divorce think of God as "the loving father or parent (they) never had in real life."¹¹

In sum, children tend to have a more difficult time adjusting to divorce when their parents have a low-conflict marriage on the other hand; in general, children tend to benefit from divorce when their parents had a high-conflict marriage. Either way, it is important to consider how a divorce may affect the children. Divorce is generally a stressful experience for children to deal with. It is crucial to keep in mind the personalities and characteristics of the children before finally deciding on divorce. The many and often unavoidable changes that accompany divorce can undermined a child's sense of security and make them fearful of the future and fret about all the things that are important in their world.

Children of the divorce may feel rejected and unloved by the parent who has left. For the same reason, children may believe the divorce is their fault, caused by something they said are or just the way they are and feel a deep sense of guilt and shame. Even after teens may be afraid that their behaviour as contributed to the divorce and made it easier for a parent to leave.¹⁵

The Aftermath of Divorce on the Society

In contemporary Nigeria, marriage is no longer the lasting institution it used to be. A large number of Nigerian families experience a divorce and many children witness their parent's divorce before or after they reach adulthood. The effects of a divorce are usually physically, emotionally and financially negative for everyone involved. More than just affecting the immediate family, divorce can have a profoundly negative effect on the society as a whole.

Divorce can save people from a bad marriage, but research has shown that it can also debilitate a society. Divorced adults are more likely to become impoverished while their children experience psychological and economic stress hindering their social development. Divorce hinders society by dissolving families and weakens belief in the family as an essential social unit. To the sociologist, the family does more than uniting the people by marriage and blood or adoption. It provides the educational, financial and emotional support its members need to thrive socially. Without this support, divorced adults and their children are mentally and physically weakened, becoming less productive social participants. Divorce breeds poverty, particularly for women and children. With fewer economic resources, most children of divorce experience disruptions such as living arrangements and schools. This creates turmoil in their lives. Sociologists believe that societies hoping to flourish and perpetuate must rear children responsibly. In the society, an intact family helps children develop strong moral character. Lacking such guidance, children of divorce are more likely to behave as social deviants. The society suffers when fewer people get married and more people get divorced. It creates a situation where more people are choosing single parenthood or cohabitation over traditional two-parent family life in the first place. Research has shown that the two-parent family is the best environment to raise healthy, happy children. It has also been shown that the two-parent family unit is the most important institution for stability in the society.

Children not living in intact married households are likely to have far higher rates of delinquency, youth crime, alcohol and drug abuse, dropout of school and to have behavioural or psychological problems.

Recommendation

The key to a successful Christian marriage is a mutual submission of the couple to Christ (Eph. 5:21). In other words, Christians have to change rebellion into submission, selfishness into love and anger into peace. The fact that marriage is God-ordained assures the Christians of God's help, especially in contending with Satan and human nature. We have found that as Christians, the Bible is the most reliable manual for providing appropriate principles for

marriage. It is not simply a social contract or an arrangement of common sense. It is a gift and creation of God with rules to obey. These Biblical rules must be obeyed. Since marriage is a promise made before God and others, adultery and divorce are frowned at as it means a very important promise has been broken. Christian couples must learn to be content with one another. Marriage can only work if there is contentment. There must be an equal amount of respect and understanding. To be equal and committed in their vows, couples, when they decide to have children, must be fair in the role of parenting. Since they chose to have them together, they should raise them together. They must remember the vow is 'till death part' them. They should remember that children from disrupted homes tend to do less well in school and subsequent careers than their peers. They are also more likely to experience the break-up of their own partnerships. Family breakdown is a major cause of harm to Children's mental health. It is not just the event of family breakdown itself, but the life that has to be lived afterwards that causes the harm.¹⁶ With God at the centre of marriage, the couple becomes stewards of the relationship they have with God both as individuals and as one "flesh".

Conclusion

Jesus said, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her and if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery (Matt. 10:11-12). This comprehensive text makes it clear that both the man and the woman are responsible for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Marriage is considered holy because God himself established it already there in the Garden of Eden giving it as a gift to the first human pair. Then, as well as now, the word of God joins the couple. By nature, that which is holy is dedicated to the service of God. In sum, Jesus brilliantly upheld the true significance of the Mosaic law, God's ideal for marriage as well as an exception made on account of people's hardness of heart while at the same time deepening people's understanding of both the true intent of the law and the nature of the marriage union. As usual, Jesus has gone to the heart of the matter. The emphasis is not on what God's stewards are permitted to do, but about how they understand and live out the desires of God's heart.

As indicated earlier, an inter-parental conflict has a powerful direct effect on children's functioning. The greater the conflict between divorcing parents, the greater the number of problems the children will experience; and moreover, problematic parent-child relations associated with divorce persist throughout the life course. Fursten opines that there is mental anguish, self-hatred and ego disintegration.¹⁷ And when this happens, then there is the toll on the society with the problem of children from disrupted families which are significantly more likely to express discontent with their lives as measured by an index of life satisfaction.

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MARRIAGE
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Abstract

Introduction
We
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state