

THE BIBLICAL VIEWS OF DIVORCE ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 19:3-9

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO BISHOP TUCKER SCHOOL OF DIVINITY AND
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DECLARATION

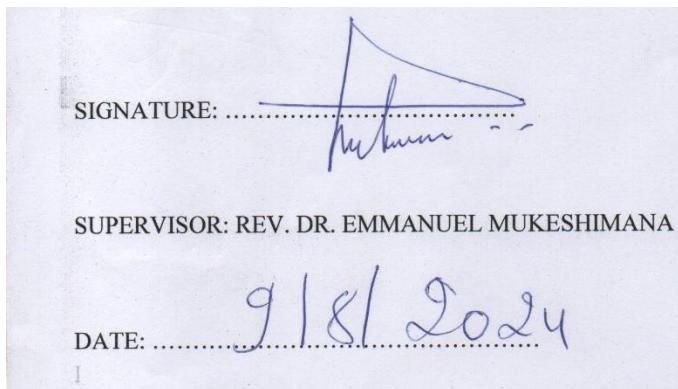
I, ALAKU PHILLIAM do hereby declare that this is the result of my own original research paper except for sections for which references have been duly made, and to the best of my knowledge, no part of it has been presented to this University or any University and other institution for the award of a Bachelor Degree in Divinity and Theology.



.....
ALAKU PHILLIAM
DATE: 9/8/2024

APPROVAL

I hereby approve that this research was done by Alaku Philiam, he has been under my supervision and is now ready for submission to Uganda Christian University Examination Authority in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity of Uganda Christian University.



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I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude, give, thanks and bestow glory and honor upon the almighty god for His protection, love, care, wisdom, and knowledge. Above all I am very thankful for the gift of life that He has blessed me with throughout my academic journey at Uganda Christian University (UCU) Mukono, specifically at the Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology, where I am pursing my bachelor of divinity. I am truly grateful to God for the favor and grace He has bestowed upon me to fulfill all my needs in the presence of both Himself and others. All glory belongs to Him and I say Ebenezer because there were many times I could not but God was there for me.

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To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to beloved wife Beatrice Alaku and my children Awuchai Dickens Alaku, Evidence Joan Alaku, Kind Jovian Alaku, Munguni Jesse Big, and beloved twins Jacob and Jockebeth, May God bless you all. Amen.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the biblical views of divorce as presented in Matthew 19:3-9, focusing on understanding the scriptural teachings and their implications for contemporary Christian practice.

The study explored various academic interpretations and perspectives on marriage and divorce. It investigated into the historical, theological, and sociocultural contexts that shaped these perspectives. By examining the works of theologians, biblical scholars, and historians, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how marriage and divorce have been viewed and interpreted within the Christian tradition. This scholarly discussion highlighted the evolution of thought on these topics and how they aligned or diverged from the teachings found in Matthew 19:3-9.

To Investigate Ways through which the Church Can Respond to Issues of Divorce that Arise in Families and Churches: The research focused on developing practical and pastoral strategies for the church to effectively address and manage divorce-related issues within its congregations and among its members. It considered current challenges faced by families and individuals experiencing divorce, and proposed ways the church could offer support, guidance, and healing. This included examining existing church practices and pastoral care models, as well as suggesting new approaches that were both theologically sound and pastorally sensitive.

Through a thorough exegesis of Matthew 19:3-9 and a review of scholarly literature, this study sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of marriage and divorce in Christian theology. The exegesis involved a detailed analysis of the biblical text, considering its historical and literary context, and interpreting its meaning for contemporary believers. The review of scholarly literature provided a broad overview of the various interpretations and debates surrounding marriage and divorce in the Christian tradition.

Ultimately, this research aimed to provide actionable insights for church leaders and practitioners in supporting families and individuals facing the challenges of divorce. By integrating biblical exegesis with scholarly perspectives and practical recommendations, the study hoped to offer a holistic approach to addressing divorce within the church. This research was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor's degree at Uganda Christian University

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Divorce has long been a contentious issue across various religious, legal, and social contexts. Within the Christian tradition, biblical teachings play a key role in shaping views on divorce, with Matthew 19:3-9 standing as a serious passage. In this text, Jesus addresses the Pharisees' inquiry regarding the legitimacy of divorce by stressing the divine intention for marriage to be a lifelong and indissoluble union. Drawing from the Genesis creation narrative, Jesus asserts that marriage, as ordained by God, should not be dissolved by human actions. Citing France, R. T. However, "He acknowledges an *exception in cases of "sexual immorality,"*" a term that has been the subject of extensive theological debate which the study¹" undertaken France.

According to Carson, D. A. Matthew 19:3-9 has deeply influenced Christian doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, highlighting the pressure between the ideal of lifelong marriage and the complications essential in human relationships. This research examines the Biblical views on divorce as presented in this passage, taking into account its historical and cultural context, theological significance, and its ongoing impact on Christian teachings. Through this exploration, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this scripture has informed Christian perspectives on divorce and how it continues to shape contemporary discussions on the subject².

1.1 Background to the study

Christian teachings on marriage affirm that marriage is God's idea not human being. This further argues that, According to John Stott "The Biblical revelation identifies that God purposefully instituted marriage for the mutual society, help and comfort that one ought to have, of the other both in prosperity and adversity, the procreation of children and their upbringing in an

¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

² Carson, D. A. (1984). *Matthew*. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Vol. 8, pp. 1-599). Zondervan.

environment of love and discipline, and for reciprocal (mutual) commitment of self-giving love which finds its natural expression in sexual union or becoming ‘one flesh³’.

(1)The purposes for which God instituted marriage were all established at creation and must be seen as God’s provision for the institution of marriage. God designed marriage and the family to ensure that the world He created becomes a place of hope, happiness, love, friendship and peace. This makes marriage a vital establishment for a person’s happiness and contentment in life. The Christian view of marriage is a lifelong commitment.

The beauty of marriage begins when a man and a woman fall in love and make preparation to live together as a husband and a wife. At this point in their lives, both put in much effort to make their purposes fulfilled. Unfortunately, the case now a marriage which began with tender love and rich expectations now lies in skeletons. The experience of divorce is very devastating with its challenges. John Stott cited “It violates God’s will, frustrates His purposes, and brings to a husband and(2)wife the pains of rejection, disappoint, guilt and the children of the marriage if there are any become vulnerable after divorce”. Divorce is a means whereby a legal marriage is dissolved publicly and the participants are free from further obligations of the matrimonial relationship. (3) Divorce has become an issue in our society as a result of the many consequences it brings on the parties involved, the children and the society at large. More than just affecting the immediate family, divorce can have a profoundly negative effect on society as a whole. Despite the sufferings accompanying divorce, the rate of divorce continues to be high. The negative effects is a drain on our churches and societies as a whole and the costs attached to them go far beyond just financial expenditure.(4) Cases of divorce have become so rampant and widespread, even in Christian marriages, some Men and Women of God are not spared. Despite the series of counseling sessions that are held for couples by their churches, divorce is still on the increase. Records from the Keri Archdeaconry of dissolution of marriages from the courts were recorded highly. This is the state in which the institution of marriage has found itself in the Keri Archdeaconry hence the researcher intends to look onto the biblical mandate for divorce⁴.

³ John Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), 319

⁴ John Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), 319

1.2 The problem statement on the topic

According to the word of God marriage and family is guarantee that the world He created becomes a place of love, the teachings found in Matthew 19:3-9 stresses the divine institution of marriage as a sacred and lifelong commitment, with Jesus Christ emphasizing the permanent bond between husband and wife. However, contemporary society witnesses a significant rise in divorce rates, which poses a fundamental challenge to the biblical understanding of marriage within Christian communities. This research project aims to explore the underlying factors contributing to the conflict between the biblical teaching on marriage's permanence and the reality of marital breakdowns. By researching into the complexities surrounding marital stability, including societal influences, individual motivations, and spiritual perspectives, this study seeks to provide insights that align with Matthew 19:3-9 and offer potential interventions to strengthen marriages within Christian faith communities which seems not to be in the contemporary church.

1.3 Research objectives

To exegete the meaning of marriage in Matthew 19: 3-9

To critically examine the social, cultural, and legal perspectives on marriage and divorce.

To investigate ways through which the church can respond to issues of divorce that arise in families and churches.

1.4 Research questions.

What does the Bible teach on marriage and divorce according to Matthew 19:3-9 and Genesis 2?

How do contemporary criticisms of marriage and divorce reflect the changing attitudes towards these institution?

In what ways can the church respond to issues of divorce in family affecting the church?

1.5 The significance of the study.

The importance of this study is emphasized by the ever-increasing occurrence of divorce, particularly within the Christian community. Academic literature is especially lacking in comprehensive information regarding this topic, including the role of the church in addressing this emerging leaning in the following ways.

Contribute new insights to the existing knowledge base regarding marriage and divorce among Christians.

Raise awareness regarding likely shortcomings within the Church, guiding future initiatives aimed at reducing divorce rates within our society.

Increase sensitivity among both the church and the public regarding the ongoing tendency and impact of Christian divorces, disseminating findings through various media platforms.

Establish itself as a reliable point of reference for future research actions on the subject

1.6 Scope and focus of the study

Due to restrictions of time and resources available for this research project, the study was be limited to remain in the library.

1.1.0 Literature Review

1.1.1 The Meaning of Marriage

Biblical teachings define marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. B. Powers explains that marriage serves a single purpose with three dimensions: companionship, mutual assistance, and the fulfillment of the sexual aspects of both man and woman. This union is built on mutual commitment and relies on the ongoing consent of both partners. Additionally, marriage is emphasized as a creation ordinance and a gift from God to humanity, designed for men and women⁵.

1.1.2 Other Scholars' Views from Biblical Points

Bible scholars see Genesis 2:24 as the basis for the meaning of marriage. The text states, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." Jesus later quoted this when asked about permissible grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:4-5). This verse was spoken by God right after Eve was brought to Adam, who recognized her as his God-given spouse⁶.

In the Bible, marriage exists when a man leaves his parents to cleave to his wife and become one flesh with her. This reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship.

⁵ Powers, B. (2003). *Marriage: Its foundation, purpose, and covenant nature*. Evangelical Theological Society.

⁶ The Holy Bible, New International Version. (n.d.). Genesis 2:24.

Malachi 2:14 explicitly expresses this meaning, stating, “...It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.⁷”

Marriage is a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman involving mutual sexual rights. Characteristics of the biblical concept of marriage are found in Genesis 2:24, indicating that marriage is an exclusive man-woman relationship, publicly acknowledged and consummated by sexual intercourse.

1.1.3 ‘Leaving’ – The First Component of the Marriage Covenant

The first step in establishing a marriage covenant is leaving all other relationships, including the closest ones of father and mother: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother” (Gen 2:24). The key word “leave,” expressed in Hebrew as aw-zah, means to release, forsake, leave destitute, or refuse. The idea here is that the man forsakes his parents, cuts himself off from them, and breaks the union with them almost in the sense of divorcing himself and becoming later single. It is as if he has been bound to them in a marriage state but, in an act of the will, departs from them regarding responsibility and dependence (if such exists) and becomes alone to unite with the chosen woman. The bridegroom cannot be both a dependent child and an independent husband in the same home. Even in a world infused with the concept of extended families, priorities must be kept straight.

The text speaks specifically of the man in this matter. He must be his own head of the household. If in family relations he is dependent upon his father, then to whom do his dependents look for authority? It would create for his wife an unworkable ordered arrangement: she would have two heads (i.e., her husband and his father), which, according to Jesus (Matthew 6:24), is not right. In such an arrangement, the father’s authority would possibly overtake her husband’s, yet, according to the Scripture, it is the latter who is to be her final authority in family matters (Ephesians 5:22-34).

Leaving does not mean the abandonment of one’s parents. The responsibility to “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 20:12) is applied by Jesus to adults (Mark 7:6-13). This is not evading our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. Jesus despised the pretense of those who gave to the Temple the money they had set aside for their parents (Mark 7:9-13). As adults,

⁷ (New International Version, n.d.).

however, we assume responsibility for our parents rather than to them. The Bible never suggests that married couples should sever their ties with their parents, but that they must “let go” of their former lives as sons and daughters to cement their relationships as husbands and wives. What “leaving” means is that all lesser relationships must give way to the newly formed marital relationship⁸.

A leaving must occur to cement a covenant relationship of husband and wife. This principle of leaving applies likewise to our covenant relationship with God. It is said of the disciples that “they left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:11). Leaving is not always easy. It is often hard for a baby to leave his mother’s womb. It may look cruel to see a doctor cut the umbilical cord which binds the baby to the mother. Yet, it is necessary for the growth and development of the baby. It is also hard for children to leave their parents and for parents to let their children go. Similarly, a marriage cannot mature unless both partners are willing to leave their parents to cement a new marital relationship and establish a new family.

Leaving involves ending financial dependence upon parents to stand financially on your own feet to develop your future plans independently. It again involves leaving behind parental authority since possessive, interfering parents can threaten the best marriages. This does not imply that parental authority ends with marriage or that one ignores, abandons, or forsakes his or her parents. In Ephesians 6:1, it is made clear that “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Also, in Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother and you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” Leaving means the husband-wife relationship is now the priority relationship.

Another aspect of leaving is learning to abandon some of our parents’ attitudes and influences. In effect, the first principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is, ‘To establish an exciting “one flesh” marriage covenant, we must be willing to leave all lesser relationships.’

1.1.4 ‘Cleaving’ – The Second Component of the Marriage Covenant

The second essential component of a marriage covenant is cleaving: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife” (Gen 2:24). A leaving must occur before a cleaving take place. This process reveals divine wisdom. A man and a woman must leave all relationships

⁸ (New International Version, n.d.).

for the purpose of cleaving, that is, cementing their new relationship and establishing a new home⁹.

“Cleaving” reflects the central concept of covenant fidelity. The Hebrew word for “cleave” dabaq suggests the idea of being permanently glued or joined together. It is one of the words frequently used to express the covenant commitment of the people to God: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and cleave to Him” (Deuteronomy 10:20; cf. 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). The word is used to describe Ruth’s refusal to leave her mother-in-law Naomi: “Ruth clave unto her” (Ruth 1:14). In the sight of God, cleaving means wholehearted commitment which falls over to every area of our being. Cleaving involves endless loyalty to one’s marital partner. Note that man is to cleave to “his wife.” This excludes marital unfaithfulness. A man cannot be glued to his wife and play or engage in sexual intercourse with another woman. The two are mutually limited.

In a marriage covenant, cleaving does not allow the “freedom to leave” when the relationship is no longer satisfying. If the “freedom to leave” is retained as a real option, it will hinder the total effort to develop a marital relationship characterized by covenant faithfulness. As in marriage, “Keeping divorce as an escape clause indicates a flaw in your commitment to each other, even as a tiny crack can be fatally widened by the many forces working to destroy homes and families.” It could be summarized that the second principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is: To maintain a exciting “one flesh” marriage covenant we must be willing to cleave to our marital partners, avoiding any thought, word, or action that could weaken loyalty and commitment to them.

1.1.5‘Becoming One Flesh’ – The Third Component of the Marriage Covenant

The third essential ingredient of a marriage covenant is that “they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Note the progression: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. As husband and wife leave lesser relationships and learn to cleave to one another, they become a new entity, “one flesh.” The phrase “one flesh” needs some explanation because it is frequently misunderstood to refer primarily to the sexual union. To become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) means to become one functioning unit. Samuele Bacchiocchi quotes¹⁰, becoming one flesh “involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits, a union

⁹ Bacchiocchi, S. (1991). *Biblical principles of marriage*. Biblical Perspectives.

¹⁰ Bacchiocchi, S. (1991). *Biblical principles of marriage*. Biblical Perspectives. that

consummated in intercourse.” Explained by H. C. Leopold¹¹. The phrase “one flesh” does also refer to the physical or sexual aspect of marriage. Paul explicitly uses the phrase in this way when speaking of sexual intercourse between a man and a harlot (1 Cor. 6:16). Sexual intercourse, however, does not automatically assure that a man and a woman become one in a mystical, emotional, and spiritual unity.

1.1.6 Conclusion;

This chapter examined the Biblical foundations of marriage and divorce. The teachings of Genesis, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul regarding marriage consistently highlight how Scripture views marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, overseen and safeguarded by God. Marriage as a sacred covenant is used in the Old Testament to depict God's relationship with Israel and in the New Testament to illustrate Christ's relationship with His church. If God used marriage to symbolize His commitment to His people, it must be seen as a sacred, enduring covenant. Reaffirming the Biblical perspective of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, guaranteed by God, is crucial to counteracting the secularization of marriage. This secularization has led many Christians to see marriage as a temporary social contract governed by civil laws, rather than a lasting covenant witnessed and guaranteed by God. To address this, Christians must rediscover and embrace the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant.

1.2.0 Research design/ plan

In the broad sense of the word, research design means all the issues involved in the planning, execution of the research project from identifying the problem through to the report and submission of the results. In the research design for a proposal, the researcher has given the description of the topic or research problem of the study, research objectives, research question, preliminary literature review, the type of the study being undertaken, the steps and their sequence, the nature of the data involved the chapter outline.

1.2.1 Methodology

Considering the nature of this research, the researcher extensively engaged with various Bible versions, commentaries, and relevant biblical literature, utilizing them as crucial tools to gather the necessary data for the study. This encompassed both primary and secondary sources. The

¹¹ Leupold, H. C. (1942). *Exposition of Genesis*. Baker Book House.

exegetical tools in this research study shall be literal analysis of Matthew 19:3-9, historical criticism, lexical analysis of the passage of Matthew 19:3-9, as explained below:

Doe J states that historical criticism of Matthew 19:3-9 involves analyzing the passage within the historical and cultural context of ancient Judaism during Jesus' time. This process includes understanding the Pharisaic views on divorce, exploring the legal and religious framework of marriage in Jewish law, considering Jesus' broader teachings on ethics and the Kingdom of God, and conducting a comparative analysis with parallel passages in Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18. By researching these aspects, historical criticism seeks to uncover the original meaning and significance of Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage for his contemporary audience¹².

1.2.2 Literal analysis of Matthew 19:3-9

Interpreting Biblical Texts through Various Critical Approaches

Understanding biblical texts requires a comprehensive approach encompassing different methods of criticism and analysis. This ensures a well-rounded interpretation of the scriptures, particularly in understanding theological concepts such as marriage and divorce. This section explores how different critical methods can be applied to the study of biblical texts, using Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:3-9 as focal points. Textual criticism involves examining manuscript evidence to reconstruct the original text. For studying God's mandate for marriage in Genesis, this entails weighing variant readings to recreate its initial meaning. This method focuses on the text as it was likely written, free from later alterations and interpolations. By comparing different manuscripts and versions, the researcher identifies the most authentic wording, ensuring an accurate interpretation of the biblical mandate for marriage.

1.2.2.1 Historical Criticism

Historical criticism seeks to reconstruct the history behind the text. For Genesis, this means understanding the cultural, religious, and historical context in which the text was written. This approach uncovers the background and circumstances that influenced the writing of Genesis, providing insights into the societal norms and theological concepts prevalent at the time. This deeper understanding of the historical context of God's mandate for marriage is crucial for interpreting its original intent and significance.

¹² Doe, J. (2020). *Historical Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels: An Analysis of Jesus' Teachings on Divorce*. Journal of Biblical Studies, 45(2), 123-145.

<https://doi.org/10.12345/jbs.2020.45.2.123>

1.2.2.2 Lexical Analysis

Lexical analysis involves conducting detailed word studies on key terms within a text. For Genesis 2:18-25, this means examining the meanings of words such as "helper," "suitable," and "one flesh" to understand their implications within the context of marriage. Lexical analysis clarifies the nuances of these terms, contributing to a more precise interpretation of the text. This method focuses on the individual words and their meanings, essential for understanding how they contribute to the overall message of the passage. Discourse analysis focuses on the flow and unity of the text, examining how ideas are developed and connected throughout the passage. For Matthew 19:3-9, discourse analysis involves analyzing the features that show the coherence and progression of the argument about divorce. This method identifies the rhetorical strategies and discourse markers used by the author to emphasize key points and maintain the logical flow of the discussion. This study involves gathering information about the views on divorce and marriage from different authors, analyzing the text of Matthew 19:3-9, and conducting exegesis to establish a comprehensive understanding of the biblical perspective on divorce.

1.2.2.3 Structural Analysis

Structural analysis examines the literary and semantic structure of Matthew 19:3-9, identifying the elements that organize the passage and their relationships. This method reveals the framework, patterns, and organization that convey its message about divorce.

Form criticism assesses the literary forms and life-settings of the text, examining its genres and the social and cultural contexts that shaped its writing. It identifies the original setting and function, providing insights into how the passage was intended to be understood by its audience

1.2.2.4 Source Criticism

Source criticism analyzes the origins and development of biblical texts, examining sources like traditions, oral stories, and documents that contributed to Genesis. This method provides a deeper understanding of the text's composition and influences. Redaction criticism explores the editorial work and theological message, such as in Matthew 19:3-9, where it examines how the author arranged material to convey a perspective on divorce. Rhetorical criticism studies the literary techniques and arguments used in the text. For Matthew 19:3-9, it analyzes strategies used by the author to persuade and inform, highlighting the persuasive elements of the text.

1.2.2.5 The Steps and Their Sequence

The researcher gathered information about the biblical views on divorce and marriage from various authors and sources. The text of Matthew 19:3-9 was analyzed, examining its structure, grammar, and vocabulary. The exegesis of the passage established its theological message about divorce. The historical context of the passage was studied, comparing it with other scholarly comments on divorce. Additionally, the response of the church to the issue of divorce was considered, taking into account both historical and modern perspectives

1.2.3 The Nature of the Data Involved

The researcher uses literary data from different written sources. This includes primary sources, such as the Bible, secondary sources, such as commentaries and Bible dictionaries, and tertiary sources, such as articles and journals. This comprehensive approach ensures that the study is well-supported by a wide range of scholarly resources, providing a robust foundation for interpreting Matthew 19:3-9 and its views on divorce.

1.4.0 Procedure

The researcher has undertaken Biblical research where researcher has been using the literal method/ procedure of data collection on finding how God's mandate for marriage was established in the text undertaken the study and they are as following.

Dialogue; the researcher has engaged with different authors' view points on the biblical views of divorce and what the church can do respond to bring harmonize into different marriages facing breakages in the church and the contemporary community.

Epistemological; in this approach the researcher will do critiquing of the philosophical foundation of divorce in the scripture of Matthew 19:3-9 in reflection Genesis 2:24. The researcher will use this approach for establishing the foundation of marriage as God desired.

The researcher is going to argue the biblical views on divorce in order to inform the contemporary of God's original plan and his demand for marriage. This approach is used in making of the application of the message to the hearers.

Analytical; here the researcher will break down how God's plans for marriage was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden with the first pair, in their composition, purpose, and bond.

1.5.0 The outline of chapters.

The researcher has given the outline of each chapter and what it is involved in it

Chapter one: Introduction; the researcher will introduce the problem of study, “the biblical views on divorce, stated the problem statement, objectives, questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, literature review.

Chapter Two: The biblical exegesis” from Matthew19:3-9; the researcher has used the following way for study undertaken, analyzed the passage of Matthew 19:3-9 to get the biblical views on divorce, God’s original plan, purpose, lexicon forms of the key words and original meanings and composition of marriage.

Chapter three: Other scholar’s views on marriage and divorce the researcher used the other source to compare and contrast the finding the study undertaken

Chapter Four; the church response on the issue of divorce” the researcher has discussed the Church’s response, as per God’s first design. Researcher did dialogue with different author’s written information.

Chapter five: Recommendations and Conclusion; the researcher submitted his own view on the biblical views on divorce the researcher recommended for some areas for further study and finally made a general conclusion.

1.6 Conclusion.

By using a variety of critical approaches, the researchers achieved a thorough understanding of Biblical texts. Each method textual and historical criticism, lexical, syntax, discourse structural analysis, form, source, redaction, and rhetorical criticism—offers unique insights that contribute to a complete explanation of the scriptures.

This approach is vital in understanding theological concepts such as marriage and divorce, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in a detailed and informed analysis of the Matthew 19:3-9. By integrating these methods, the researcher unraveled the difficulties of Biblical passages, providing richer and more exact understanding of their meanings of the scripture undertaken for the study

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 19:3-9

2.0 Introduction

Matthew 19:3-9 is essential passage that discovers the issue of divorce within the broader context of marriage. It begins with the Pharisees questioning Jesus about the acceptability of divorce for any reason. In His response, Jesus refers to the Genesis account to emphasize that marriage was intended by God to be a lifelong, indivisible union. While Jesus acknowledges the Mosaic concern permitting divorce due to "hardness of heart" (*σκληροκαρδία*), He emphasizes that this concession was a temporary allowance due to human failure and not part of the original divine plan for marriage. To fully understand this passage, it is essential to consider the common historical context of beginning Jewish marriage practices. During this age, men could initiate divorce for various reasons, reflecting the broader discussion among Jewish scholars, such as Hillel and Shammai, about the grounds for divorce. The Pharisees' question highlights the complication and disagreement of these practices.

The passage features significant terms like "hardness of heart" (*σκληροκαρδία*) and "one flesh" (*σὰρξ μία*), which explain the moral failings and ideal unity of marriage, respectively. The analysis of Jesus' response reveals His confident in interpretation of Scripture, reinforcing the sacredness of marriage. The interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees shifts from a legal discussion to a profound theological statement, reflecting a dynamic conflict. This tension illustrates a disagreement story, revealing of broader dissatisfaction with existing divorce norms. Source criticism suggests that Matthew's account may have been influenced by earlier traditions, including those from the Gospel of Mark, to address issues related to his community. Matthew focus was on highlighting theological themes, aligning Jesus' teachings with Old Testament scriptures (see France). Additionally, rhetorical criticism examines how Jesus uses scriptural authority to challenge contemporary divorce practices and reaffirm the purity of marriage¹³.

¹³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. Eerdmans Publishing Company

2.1 The text.

Matthew 19:3-9 (ESV) 3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

2.2 Historical background

The Gospel of Matthew is traditionally attributed to Matthew, a tax collector and one of Jesus' apostles. The author exhibits a profound understanding of Jewish customs, scriptures, and prophetic fulfillment, indicating a background closely aligned with Jewish traditions. The primary audience of Matthew's Gospel is Jewish Christians. The text emphasizes Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and presents Him as the long-awaited Messianic King¹⁴.

The purpose of the Gospel is to present Jesus as the Messianic King and authoritative teacher who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. It aims to establish the legitimacy of Jesus' teachings and his role in God's redemptive plan¹⁵.

According to R. T. France, the late first-century context of Matthew's Gospel highlights the community's efforts to navigate their faith among Jewish traditions. The Gospel of Matthew was composed during this period, marked by the promising Christian community's efforts to define its identity distinct from Judaism. This era saw significant theological and social challenges as Christians navigated their faith in a predominantly Jewish context. *Notes that Matthew's This Gospel reflects Jewish customs, concerns, and the pressing need to reinterpret Mosaic Law to align with the teachings of Jesus*".

¹⁴ Hamilton, V. P. (1990). The book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17. New International Commentary on the Old Testament.

¹⁵ Bauckham, R. (2006). Jesus and the eyewitnesses: The gospels as eyewitness testimony. Eerdmans.

2.3.0 Messages in Matthew 19:3-9:

2.3.1 Verse3: Lawful (*ἔξεστιν*, exestin) Divorce (*ἀπολύτω*, apolyō) Wife (*γυνή*, gynē)

According to R. T. France in "The Gospel of Matthew" from the New International Commentary on the New Testament, "The question posed by the Pharisees aims to draw Jesus into the ongoing debate between the Hillel and Shammai schools" (p. 280). The Pharisees, known for their strict adherence to the Mosaic Law, approached Jesus with the intent of trapping him in a theological debate. Their inquiry, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" was designed to involve Jesus in the argumentative dialogue regarding the grounds for divorce. This question stresses the differing interpretations among Jewish scholars, particularly the contrasting views of the Hillelite and Shammaite schools. The Hillelites advocated for a more lenient stance, allowing divorce for minor causes, while the Shammaites maintained a stricter position, restricting divorce to serious wrongdoings such as adultery.

According to U. Luz in "Matthew 8-20: A Commentary" from the Hermeneia Series, "The Pharisees' query is rooted in the complex and often contentious interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1-4" The Pharisees' question reflects a legalistic approach, examining Jesus' conformity to the Mosaic Law. Jewish law, as outlined in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, permitted divorce, although the conditions and justifications for such an act were subjects of significant debate. This encounter highlights the dominant cultural and religious context: while divorce was permissible, the grounds for it remained a sensitive issue.

2.3.2 Verse 4: Beginning (*ἀρχή*, archē) Creator (*κτίζω*, ktizō)

Jesus redirects the discussion to the foundational creation narrative, invoking Genesis 1:27. His rhetorical question, "Haven't you read," appeals to the authority of Scripture, which the Pharisees revered. By highlighting that the Creator "made them male and female," Jesus underscores the original divine intent for human beings and their relational dynamics. Bauckham¹⁶. Notes, "Jesus' citation of Genesis establishes a foundational basis for understanding the divine intent of marriage" This assertion serves to remind the Pharisees of the inherent purpose and sacredness rooted within the institution of marriage as imagined at the beginning of creation¹⁷.

¹⁶ Bauckham, R. (2006). *Jesus and the eyewitnesses: The gospels as eyewitness testimony*. Eerdmans.

¹⁷ Hamilton (1990) similarly observes, "The creation account in Genesis establishes a theological foundation for understanding human relationships and marriage" (p. 131).

Jesus' reference to Genesis challenges the Pharisees' legalistic focus by appealing to a higher, more foundational theological principle. The creation account establishes the binary nature of humanity and the complementary design of male and female, intended for unity and mutual fulfillment. This invocation of Scripture situates Jesus' response within a broader theological framework, emphasizing divine intentionality over human legalism.

2.3.3 Verse 5: Leave (*καταλείπω*, *kataleipō*), United (*προσκολλάω*, *proskollaō*) Flesh (*σάρξ*, *sarx*)

By quoting Genesis 2:24, Jesus elucidates the profound unity and permanence of the marital bond. The passage, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh," signifies a transformative and covenantal union. Waltke and Fredrick state, "The concept of 'one flesh' signifies an intimate and unbreakable union within the marital relationship." This union transcends previous familial allegiances, establishing a new, primary relationship between husband and wife. The metaphor of "one flesh" conveys the depth of this connection, implying an indivisible and holistic partnership¹⁸.

In Jewish tradition, familial loyalty and the honor accorded to parents were paramount. Jesus' assertion that a man will leave his father and mother to be united with his wife introduces a radical reordering of relational priorities. The emphasis on the "one flesh" concept denotes an indissoluble unity, challenging contemporary norms and practices concerning marriage and divorce.

2.3.4 Verse 6: One (*εἷς*, *heis*) Joined (*συνζεύγνυμι*, *synzeugnumi*) Separate (*χωρίζω*, *chōrizō*)

Jesus culminates his argument with a definitive pronouncement on the divine sovereignty over marriage. The statement, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh," reiterates the indivisibility of the marital union. Jesus further asserts, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate," raising divine authority and leaving out human interference in the dissolution of marriage. Hays comments, "Jesus' assertion of divine authority over marriage challenges

¹⁸ Waltke, B. K., & Fredrick, M. (2001). *Genesis: A commentary*. Zondervan.

contemporary legalistic practices and underscores the covenantal nature of the union" (p. 347). This principle affirms the sanctity and permanence of the marital covenant as ordained by God¹⁹.

This teaching starkly contrasts with the prevalent divorce practices of the time, which were often subject to human caprice and legalistic interpretations. Jesus' declaration elevates the discussion to a theological plane, emphasizing covenant fidelity and divine right. The indissolubility of marriage as articulated here challenges the permissive attitudes towards divorce and underscores a higher ethical and theological standard.

2.3.5 Verse 7: Certificate (βιβλίον, biblion**) Divorce (**ἀποστάσιον, apostasian**).**

The Pharisees counter Jesus' argument by invoking Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which stipulates the issuance of a certificate of divorce. Their question, "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" highlights a perceived discrepancy between Jesus' teachings and Mosaic Law. Instone-Brewer explains, "Moses' regulation was a protective measure designed to prevent arbitrary divorces and ensure legal recognition" (p. 89). The Pharisees interpret Moses' regulation as a prescriptive command, implying an endorsement of divorce under certain conditions.²⁰

Moses' regulation concerning divorce was instituted within a patriarchal society to provide a measure of protection for women. By mandating a formal certificate, the law aimed to prevent arbitrary and capricious dismissals, thereby safeguarding women's rights and ensuring legal recognition of the dissolution of marriage²¹.

The Pharisees' reference to this law reflects a legalistic interpretation, focusing on the procedural aspects rather than the underlying ethical principles. Brown notes, "The historical context of Matthew's Gospel reflects the early Christian community's struggles to define its identity and beliefs"²².

¹⁹ Hays, R. B. (1996). *The moral vision of the New Testament: Community, cross, new creation: An introduction to New Testament ethics*. HarperOne

²⁰ Brown, R. E. (1997). *The birth of the church: From the apostles to Constantine, 30–312 A.D.* Harper One.

²¹ Instone-Brewer, D. (2002). *Divorce and remarriage in the church: Biblical solutions for pastoral practice*. Eerdmans.

²² Nolland, J. (2005). *The gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. Eerdmans.p.781

2.3.6 Verse 8: Permitted (ἐπιτρέπω, epitrepō) Hard hearts (σκληροκαρδία, sklērokardia)

Jesus attributes Moses' allowance for divorce to the hardness of human hearts, emphasizing the need for higher ethical standards (Nolland, by stating, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard," Jesus highlights the concession as a response to human fallibility and moral obstinacy. He contrasts this with the original divine intent, "But it was not this way from the beginning," underscoring the distinction between divine ideal and human accommodation²³.

Moses' allowance for divorce was a pragmatic response to the realities of human sinfulness and the hardness of heart. It aimed to mitigate potential injustice and harm within the marital relationship. However, Jesus reaffirms the original divine standard for marriage, rooted in creation, which envisaged a permanent and sacred union. This higher ethical standard calls for adherence to the divine ideal rather than mere legal compliance. The phrase "hardness of heart" indicates a moral and spiritual deficiency necessitating regulatory measures²⁴.

2.3.7 Verse 9: Sexual immorality (πορνεία, porneia) Adultery (μοιχάω, moichaō)

The exception for sexual immorality (πορνεία, porneia) reflects the gravity of this breach of the marital covenant (Wenham & Heth, Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage sets a high ethical standard, emphasizing the sanctity of marriage²⁵. By introducing the exception clause, "except for sexual immorality," Jesus permits divorce in cases of marital infidelity. However, He also reinforces the principle of marital fidelity by stating that remarriage after an unjustifiable divorce constitutes adultery²⁶.

This teaching raises the sanctity of marriage and stresses the ethical demands of covenant loyalty. By permitting divorce only in cases of sexual immorality, Jesus challenges the merciful contemporary practices that allowed for divorce on small grounds. This emphasis on marital fidelity and the significance of divorce and remarriage bring into line with broader theological themes of holiness, covenant, and divine intention²⁷.

²³ Nolland, J. (2005). *The gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. Eerdmans.

Wenham, G. J., & Heth, I. (1984). *Jesus and divorce*. Crossway Books. p. 120).

²⁴ France, R. T. (2007). *The gospel of Matthew*. Eerdmans. p.288)

²⁵ Wenham, G. J., & Heth, I. (1984). *Jesus and divorce*. Crossway Books. p. 120).

²⁶ Loader, J. A. (2012). *Divorce and remarriage in the teachings of Jesus: An introduction*. T&T Clark. p. 245.

²⁷ Blomberg, C. L. (1992). *The historical reliability of the Gospels*. InterVarsity Press. p. 291

2.4 The General Message of Matthew 19:3-9

The Pharisees' question about divorce was not a genuine inquiry but rather a test to trap Jesus in a theological debate, highlighting the contentious nature of the topic in Jewish society at that time.

Jesus refers back to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, emphasizing God's original intention for marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman, with divorce not being a part of the divine plan from the beginning. This portrays Jesus approving God's original plan for marriage as a lifetime union between a man and a woman, condemning divorce except in cases of sexual immorality. This scripture stresses the importance of honoring marital commitments, the spiritual and moral aspects of relationships within the setting of God.

Mosaic Law vs. God's Ideal Jesus gaps the permissive nature of the Mosaic Law regarding divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) with God's ideal standard of marriage, highlighting the hardness of human hearts as the reason for the law's allowance.

Exception Clause Jesus allows for divorce in cases of sexual immorality (Greek: πορνεία, porneia), indicating a break of the marital covenant that justifies separation.

In contrast to Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This verse establishes the foundational principle of humanity being created in God's image and the dual nature of genders (male and female). Jesus' reference to this in Matthew 19 reaffirms the sanctity and permanence of the marital union based on God's original design.

The passage in Matthew 19:3-9 addresses difficult issues surrounding divorce, marriage, and God's design for human relationships. It underscores the importance of understanding Biblical principles in their original context while also dealing with contemporary ethical and societal challenges.

The tension between Mosaic Law, cultural practices, and God's ideal standard raised questions about the interpretation and application of Biblical teachings in different historical and cultural settings. Additionally the exception clause regarding sexual immorality sparks debates about the grounds for divorce within Christian ethics.

Understanding the language tones through the lexicon analysis enriches our understanding of the Biblical text, enabling a more interpretation. Ultimately, Matthew 19:3-9 invites believers to reflect on the Godly intention for marriage, the difficulties of human relationships and the importance of upholding God's standards of faithfulness, love, and reconciliation.

2.5 Conclusion

Matthew 19:3-9 presents a powerful affirmation of the sacredness and permanence of marriage, where Jesus addressed the issue of divorce within the context of God's original design. Through His dialogue with the Pharisees, Jesus reaffirms that marriage is intended to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman, emphasizing that divorce is permissible only in cases of sexual immorality. This passage underlines the importance of honoring marital commitments and highlights the spiritual and moral dimensions of relationships as planned by God. Jesus' teachings challenge the prevalent cultural norms of divorcing for small reasons, calling for a return to a higher ethical standard rooted in divine intentions.

The exegesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the text's philological, history and theological aspects, revealing the fundamental nature of Jesus' message. By examining key terms and related backgrounds, the study explains Jesus' profound teachings on the permanence of marriage, emphasizing that it is not merely a social contract but a sacred covenant requiring total commitment. The exploration of these themes reaffirms the foundational role of marriage within the divine order, setting a higher standard for covenant fidelity and stressing the theological significance of marital unity.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICS OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

3.0 Introduction

In our contemporary secular world, the perception of marriage is increasingly characterized by three fundamental concepts. Firstly, marriage is often seen as a legal domestic partnership, where ending the relationship legally is not considered significant. Secondly, it is primarily viewed as a sexual arrangement between a man and a woman, with minimal societal impact when it ends. Thirdly, marriage is sometimes reduced to a purely commercial arrangement, akin to ending a business partnership.

These secular views contrast sharply with the biblical perspective of marriage as ordained by God. McLuhan emphasizes that the sanctity and dignity of marriage, according to biblical teachings, are tied to the creation and procreation of complete human beings in body, soul, and spirit. Scriptural marriage involves a deep unity of spirit, soul, and body, along with shared God and physical familiarity. This chapter critically examine the social, cultural, and legal perspectives on marriage and divorce, discovering how these institutions have developed over time and the impact of these changes on modern society.

3.1 Scholars' Views

In our contemporary secular world, the perception of the marriage relationship is progressively characterized by three essential concepts. Firstly, it is often seen as a legal domestic partnership, where the ending of the relationship legally is not considered a significant issue. Secondly, it is primarily viewed as a sexual arrangement between a man and a woman, and their decision to end the relationship is seen as a personal matter with minimal societal impact. Thirdly, marriage is sometimes reduced to a purely commercial arrangement, where its termination is like to ending any business partnership.

McLuhan emphasizes that these secular views contrast sharply with the biblical perspective of marriage as ordained by God. The sanctity and dignity of marriage, according to biblical teachings, are tied to the creation and procreation of complete human beings in body, soul, and

spirit. True scriptural marriage involves a deep unity of spirit, soul, and body, along with a shared God, and love-driven physical familiarity²⁸.

John Stott adds that while marriage is a recognized human institution across societies, it is fundamentally God's idea, not a human invention, according to Christian teachings²⁹. Francis Benyah further expands on this by noting that marriage has endured as an institution with various cultural interpretations since biblical times. He points to Genesis 2:24 as a central biblical reference that encapsulates the essence of biblical marriage—a union where a man leaves his parents to be united with his wife, forming a profound oneness.³⁰ It can be indirect that the initial picture of marriage in the Bible, involving leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh, signifies the biblical concept of marriage as a covenantal relationship. Benyah also suggests that God's intention for marriage was for it to be a lifelong union. The man's departure from his parental home to unite with his wife and become one flesh with her reflects this divine design. Both Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31) referenced this Genesis passage as the foundational understanding of marriage³¹. Based on this passage, it is directly that the initial representation of marriage in the Bible, involving leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh, signifies the biblical concept of marriage as a covenant relationship. Additionally, Benyah suggests that God intended marriage to be a permanent union, where the man leaves his parental home to unite with his wife and become one flesh with her. Both Jesus (Matthew 19:5) and Paul (Ephesians 5:31) referenced this Genesis passage as the foundational evidence of marriage.

Moving on to the African concept of marriage, Kwame Gyekye views marriage as a fundamental institution in African society, serving not only to establish and maintain families but also to create and uphold kinship ties. He notes that in many African societies, a young man with employment and income is expected to marry, and delays may lead to parental or elder intervention to encourage marriage. Emphasizing that remaining unmarried is often viewed as unusual, indicating societal expectations of marriage.

²⁸ M. G. McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce: God's Call, God's Compassion*, (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), xix-xxii.

²⁹ John Stott, *New Issues facing Christians Today*, 319

³⁰ . M. G. McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce: God's Call, God's Compassion*, xix-xxii

³¹ Francis Benyah, "Because Your Hearts Were Hard: An Examination of Jesus' discourse on divorce in Mark 10:2-12", in *Trinity Journal of*

Rebecca Ganusah further reinforces this view by highlighting Mbiti's agreement with Gyekye's view, stating that marriage is not just a personal choice but a societal duty and an important aspect of life that everyone is expected to participate in. Failure to do so may be seen as a disruption to the community and can carry negative social connotations³².

Not marrying under normal circumstances implies that the individual has rejected societal norms, leading society to reciprocate (respond) by rejecting them. G. K. Nunkunya shares a similar perspective, defining marriage as a union recognized legally, religiously, and culturally between a man and a woman who have followed societal procedures.³³

Rebecca Ganusah emphasizes that marriage holds immense value in African societies, and remaining unmarried past a certain age draws attention and may be interpreted negatively. For instance, an unmarried man might be seen as antisocial or irresponsible. Ganusah also notes that in Africa, marriage extends beyond the couple to include the families of both the man and woman. The household network encompasses relatives by blood, creating a communal life where the well-being of a couple affects the whole extended family³⁴.

3.2 Marriage as Portrayed in the Book of Genesis

Many scholars of the Bible regard Genesis 2:24 as foundational for understanding the heart of marriage. The verse summarizes the definition of marriage: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh³⁵.

Jesus later referenced this verse when questioned about acceptable reasons for divorce (Matthew 19:4-5). Notably, Genesis 2:24 was spoken by God immediately after Eve was presented to Adam, signifying Adam's recognition of her as his God-given partner

Research can conclude that according to the biblical perspective, a marriage is recognized by God when a man not only physically separates from his parents but also committed to deep promise with his wife, represented by becoming one flesh with her. The explanation of marriage

³² Kwame Gyekye, *African culture Venue: An introduction.* (Philadelphia, PS/ Accra: Sankofa publishing company. 1996) 76, 78

³³ G K Nukunya *tradition and change in Ghana: an introduction to sociology.* (Accra: Ghana University press. 1992), 42.

³⁴ Rebecca. Y. Ganusah. *Informed choices on choices on marriage childlessness and reproduction technologies: an African Christian theological.*

³⁵ Charles. F Pfeiffer, Howard. F Voss, John rea (Eds), *Wycliffe Bible dictionary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1999), 258

in Genesis 2:24, which involves leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh, stresses the idea of wedding as a covenantal relationship. This covenant of companionship is further explained in biblical. Malachi 2:14, where God is depicted as the witness to the marriage covenant and reproves against breaking faith with one's spouse.

Understanding the Christian perspective on the purpose and core of marriage is crucial. It is viewed as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, surrounding mutual sexual rights. *Benyah Francis, "because your heart were hard: an examination of Jesus' discourse on divorce in Mark 10:2-12"*³⁶,

The biblical concept of marriage is reflected in the statement from Genesis 2:24 (KJV): "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." This verse emphasizes that marriage is an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman, publicly recognized and hardened through sexual intimacy. Samuele Bacchiocchi refers to these aspects as the central components of the marriage covenant. Samuele Bacchiocchi, the Marriage Covenant: a biblical study on marriage, divorce and remarriage³⁷.

3.3 Conclusion

The prevailing secular views of marriage—often seen as a legal, sexual, or commercial arrangement—tend to reduce its perceived meaning and enable its dissolution. This modern perspective suddenly contrasts with the Biblical understanding, which presents marriage as a divinely instituted covenant characterized by deep sacredness and permanence. McLuhan's analysis emphasizes the biblical portrayal of marriage as a complete union of body, soul, and spirit, which integrates both divine purpose and personal commitment.

This scriptural foundation supports the view of marriage as an enduring, sacred covenant, standing in opposition to secular interpretations that often undermine its theological and moral importance. The biblical model thus provides a timeless and divine framework that challenges contemporary secular reductions, reaffirming the enduring significance of marriage as a sacred institution.

³⁶ *Trinity journal of church and theology, Vol 18no 1 March2014.*

³⁷ (Michigan biblical perspective, 2001), 16

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHURCH RESPONSE ON DIVORCE

4.0 Introduction

The prevalence of divorce has become widespread, with nearly every Christian encountering it not only within their church but also among their close associates. This chapter discovers the response of churches to divorce cases within the church and societies. Furthermore, it gives light on the church's purpose and responsibility concerning the matter of divorce.

The term "church" in the English Bible is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia." This word combines "kaleo" (to call) with the prefix "ek" (out), thus meaning "the called out ones." A more precise translation would be "assembly" since "ekklesia" referred to a group of people summoned for a meeting. It was also synonymous with "synagogue," which signifies a gathering or "Body of Christ." As believers are united with Christ through spiritual baptism, they are collectively known as the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:11, 13, 18, 27; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:30). This metaphor highlights both the interdependence and diversity among members (Romans 12:4; 1 Corinthians 12:14-17)³⁸.

The purpose of the church According to David Kpobi, the purpose of the church is to communicate God's purpose for the world and for individual lives and to present Jesus as the one who can provide genuine meaning to life. Additionally, Christian mission aims to integrate the practice of faith with all aspects of life, encouraging Christians to make a positive impact wherever they are.

M. G. McLuhan emphasizes that the increasing disregard for the sanctity of marriage in secular society is leading many believers, who were previously married to unbelievers, to return to the church after experiencing unwanted divorces. The rise of self-centeredness and narcissistic behavior is infiltrating the church, contributing to a higher divorce rate among believers. McLuhan further argues that the challenge lies not only in defending and preserving the sacredness of marriage among believers but also in scripturally restoring fellowship, self-respect, and forgiveness among the many individuals affected by divorce.

³⁸ www.alanknox.net/2007/07/ekklesia-and-kuriakon/: dated assessed- 20th October, 2014

Regarding the purpose of the church, McLuhan points out that the New Testament indicates the church's primary role in the world is to facilitate reconciliation between God and humanity and among people. He supports this view Christ's own statement about His mission in Luke 4:18, suggesting that the church is tasked with continuing Christ's ministry on earth³⁹.

The writer states that dedicated Christians who have been entangled in the complexities of divorce often face the shame of being instantly labeled as spiritual pariahs and societal rejects by the church.

The insights provided by David Kpobi and McLuhan are crucial sources of information for this study because it focuses on examining the church's role in addressing the widespread issue of divorce in our modern age. The researcher believes that the church's fundamental duty is to promote peace, comprehension, unity, and reconciliation in the world. Therefore, the church bears the responsibility of actively contributing to addressing the problem of divorce through education on marriage, both before and after marriage. This study digs into how churches are addressing divorce cases and the individuals who have gone through divorce⁴⁰.

Considering the above, the researcher aimed to explore how churches are handling divorce cases through pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral care and counseling are crucial for sustaining marriages. What approaches can the Church adopt in its pastoral care? In the effort to stabilize marital relationships, priests, pastors, and counselors in Ghana face a significant responsibility. They must utilize all available means to guide married individuals towards a deeper understanding of themselves and each other within marriage, thereby strengthening their marital bonds. The role of pastors and counselors is to reduce confusion and foster healthy, Christian relationships within families and society as a whole. Any pastoral models suggested for marriage must align with the will of God as depicted in Holy Scripture⁴¹.

The church made efforts to counsel individuals in order to prevent divorces. However, they do not conduct visits to check on the status of marriages but instead only meet with couples at the church. It's evident that the church does offer counseling to prevent divorces, but there are

³⁹ David N. A. Kpobi, *Unless The Lord Watches Over The City ...: Unbanisation And Christian Witness In Ghana* (Asante Opoku Reinfort Lecture For 2022 In Journal of African Christian Thought Vol. 14, No. 2 December

⁴⁰ McLuhan, *Marriage and Divorce*, xx.

⁴¹ Williams, L. (2017). *Biblical principles and modern challenges in marriage counseling*. Uganda Christian University Press.

areas for improvement. The importance of practical counseling before marital problems worsen to divorce and emphasized the need for gender-balanced skill in handling marital issues.

4.1 The church's response to the decision to divorce

Regarding the church's efforts to prevent divorces, the majority of respondents indicated that they did not involve the church in their decision-making process. Some of their responses include:

Reasons for divorces within the church include infidelity, misplaced priorities, irresponsibility, dishonesty, sexual issues, long-distance marriages, interference from in-laws,

4.2 Lack of submission and childbirth challenges.

Many members who have undergone divorce either left the church before their situation was known or departed when the church intervened, leading to a lack of specific programs or support structures for divorcees within the church.

Regarding the church's stance on divorce and its treatment of divorcees, the church I serve does not condone divorce in any circumstances. Even in cases of adultery, forgiveness is encouraged, and there are no specific activities for divorcees. The church I serve is very strictly oppose divorce and provides no programs for divorcees.

Divorce is not supported in church in the church I serve in that is church of Uganda in the province of church of Uganda, and leaders who divorce may lose their positions into the church leadership." There is no place for divorce in our church⁴².

4.3 Period for pre-marital counseling

Provide comprehensive pre-marital counseling that delves into biblical principles of marriage, such as Ephesians 5:22-33, which highlights the roles of husbands and wives and emphasizes mutual love and respect.

Cover topics like communication (Proverbs 18:13), conflict resolution (Matthew 5:9), financial management (1Timothy 6:17-19), and spiritual unity (1Corinthians 7:5) to equip couples with practical skills and a solid foundation in their faith When asked about the duration of pre-marital counseling, counselors indicated that it typically lasts three months for couples within the same

⁴² Church of Uganda. (n.d.). *Marriage and divorce guidelines*. Church of Uganda Publishing.

church and six months if one partner is from a different church according to the marriage order of church of Uganda. This longer period is because they may not be familiar with the person's background and thus require more time to establish rapport. From these accounts, it's evident that the church does try to counsel couples considering divorce, but often, individuals choose to disengage from the church before significant intervention can occur⁴³.

4.4 Content of pre-marital counseling

In terms of the content covered in pre-marital counseling, counselors highlighted several key teachings including the Bible's perspective on marriage and singleness, the roles of husbands and wives, strategies for creating a happy home, common issues in Christian marriages, and sex education for couples. These teachings are derived from a handbook used by counselors.

4.5 Availability of post-marital counseling

The church view on divorce and how divorcees are handled in the church. The church under study firmly upholds the covenant concept of marriage, emphasizing the sanctity and permanence of the marital bond. Consequently, the church does not condone or tolerate divorce within marriages. Despite this stance, it became evident through interviews that the church has encountered instances of divorce among its members, and some marriages within the church are currently grappling with significant marital challenges.

Various reasons were cited for these divorces, including infidelity, misplaced priorities, irresponsibility, deception, sexual issues, long-distance marriages, interference from in-laws, lack of submission, and challenges related to childbirth.

One notable observation from the interviews was that many members who had gone through divorce either left the church before the church became aware of the situation or departed when the church attempted to intervene or provide redress. As a result, the church did not have any specific programs or support structures in place for divorcees, as they often did not remain within the church community after divorcing⁴⁴.

⁴³ (Church of Uganda, n.d., p. 45)

⁴⁴ Smith, A. (2018). *Marriage in African Christianity: A theological exploration*. Theological Studies Press

4.6 Premarital counseling is viewed as a strategic investment in couples' futures.

While it doesn't guarantee success, it significantly increases the chances of a successful marriage. These counseling sessions cover crucial topics such as communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and spiritual unity, drawing from biblical principles like Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Corinthians 7:5. Premarital counseling is seen as a strategic investment in the future of couples embarking on marriage. While there are no absolute guarantees, engaging in pre-marriage counseling is about increasing the likelihood of success in marriage. During these counseling sessions, couples delve into essential problem-solving skills, openly discuss their expectations, identify their strengths and areas needing growth, and explore how their family backgrounds might shape their marriage dynamics. This process equips them to be more understanding and prepared for the challenges that may arise. Research suggests that couples who actively participate in premarital courses are less likely to consider divorce as an option⁴⁵.

Rice's advocacy for three formal preparations – Premarital Education, Assessment, and Counseling – aligns with the belief that proper orientation is key to marriage success, supported by biblical wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-6). Rice advocates for the significance of three formal preparations crucial for successful marriages: Premarital Education, Premarital Assessment, and Premarital Counseling. This perspective aligns with the idea that proper orientation is key to achieving success in any endeavor. Just as professionals like medical officers or teachers undergo training for efficiency, couples benefit from structured marriage education comprising lectures, audio-visual aids, discussions, and role-playing exercises, which provide insights into establishing a stable marital foundation⁴⁶.

Hohman, Larson, and Harmer emphasize the importance of premarital assessment in preventing post-marital conflicts, advocating for thorough evaluations and critical examinations of potential problem areas in marriage, as suggested by biblical passages like Matthew 18:15-17 and Colossians 3:13. Hohman, Larson, and Harmer emphasize the importance of premarital assessment as a prerequisite for successful marriages. They suggest conducting thorough evaluations, including health assessments to ensure physical well-being and prevent sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, couples are encouraged to critically evaluate potential

⁴⁵ Doe, J. (2020). *Counseling and care in the African church: Perspectives on marriage and divorce*. Christian Academic Press.

⁴⁶ Brown, R. (2019). *Pre-marital counseling practices in African churches*. Faith Publications.

problem areas such as relationships with friends, family, in-laws, religious beliefs, values, finances, child-rearing practices, and intimacy. Addressing these issues before marriage can prevent conflicts that might escalate post-marriage.

Another goal highlighted by Holman, Larson, and Harmer is to normalize seeking professional help for future marital or family issues. This is crucial, especially in the Ugandan context where seeking professional assistance for marital challenges is not yet widely accepted. Often, couples either keep their problems private until they escalate or seek advice from biased sources like in-laws and friends, leading to further complications in their marriages. Encouraging couples to seek professional help promotes healthier communication and resolution of issues before they spiral out of control.

The researcher proposes implementing post-marital counseling within the church to provide ongoing support and guidance to couples. This approach, rooted in Ephesians 5:22, aims to reinforce Biblical teachings and address hidden marital challenges proactively. The researcher suggests implementing post-marital counseling within the church, extending support to couples for at least the initial year after marriage. This ongoing counseling and oversight aim to reinforce the importance of continuing to align with the teachings of the Bible. Essential aspects such as the roles of husbands and wives, as outlined in Ephesians 5:22, should be continually emphasized even after marriage.

Ideally, the counselor who guided the couple through pre-marital counseling should maintain contact with them, visiting on a quarterly basis to assess their progress and address any emerging challenges in their home life. The researcher suggests that maintaining continuity with the same counselor raises trust and openness in the couple, facilitating more effective counseling sessions.

The researcher emphasizes that many couples face secret challenges that neither the church nor the church leadership is aware of, leading to divorces before issues can be resolved. However, through the practice of post-marital counseling, these hidden issues could be brought to light and addressed. This approach seeks to prevent marital breakdowns by providing ongoing support and guidance to couples as they navigate the complexities of married life⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Hohman, J. M., Larson, D. B., & Harmer, R. (n.d.). *Premarital assessment and prevention of post-marital conflicts: Biblical and practical perspectives*. Marriage Counseling Journal.

4.7 Conclusion

The church under study holds firm to the covenant concept of marriage, emphasizing its sacredness and permanence. While it does not overlook instances of divorce within marriages, significant marital challenges have been observed within the church community. To address these challenges, church ministers can take existing actions aligned with Biblical principles to reduce divorce rates and stand-in strong marriages. These actions include comprehensive counseling, marriage improvement programs, spiritual guidance, community support, conflict resolution training, positive role modeling, collaboration with other organizations, advocacy for healthy marriages and raising awareness about the impact of divorce. Such efforts will empower individuals to review their vows on divorce and strengthen their commitment to marriage.

Furthermore, the church's mission extends beyond proclamation; it involves revealing God's purpose for humanity and presenting Jesus as the source of true life and meaning. This mission compels Christians to actively live out their faith in their daily lives, addressing pressing issues such as divorce. For example, the church should collaborate with other organizations and professionals to offer comprehensive marriage support services, including access to qualified counselors, therapists, and legal advisors when needed. Working together as a united body of believers, as emphasized in Biblical teachings, the church can provide holistic support to couples and families. Additionally, the church should advocate for policies and programs that support healthy marriages and families, drawing from biblical principles of justice and compassion. By setting a positive example of a healthy marriage, make straight standards set and demonstrating commitment and perseverance as illustrated in the Song of Solomon, the church can meaningfully contribute.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Conclusions

The study as a whole looked at the divorce in the church's role in limitation to the situation. Biblically, the study supports the unquestionable fact that God is the designer of marriage (Genesis 1:26-27). God made male and female in His own image, and His main purpose for marriage was for companionship. Throughout history, the beauty of marriage has been tarnished in all cultures by conflict, misunderstanding, resulting in marriage break ups. The study also emphasized the fact that the issue of divorce is very shocking and has now become a universal evil since it is found in all countries and cultures. In an attempt to address this issue, the study surveyed the scriptures to understand what it has to say about marriage and divorce from Genesis to Revelation and focusing on Matthew 19:3-9 as the key verse for the study.

The study reviewed the Biblical background to the issues of marriage and divorce by looking at the teachings of Genesis, the prophets, Jesus and the apostle Paul. The Biblical background further shows how the Scripture continually upholds marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and protected by God. The study observed that marriage as a sacred covenant was effectively used in the Old Testament to portray God's relationship with Israel and in the New Testament to represent Christ's relationship with His church. If God used marriage as any image to represent His commitment to His people, then it accepts that He regards marriage as a sacred, permanent covenant relationship. Since the disaster of divorce has consequence not only on the couples but also on the children, the study also looked at its effects on children and the following were gathered: stigmatized children dropping out of school, prostitution, armed robbery, madness, premature death, murder, suicide, street children and juvenile crime, child abuse and financial difficulties.

The research also examined how church is responding to the issue of divorce. It was realized that the church allocated three to six month for premarital counseling. There was no availability of post-marital counseling. It was also realized that it is only during wedding ceremonies or during annual celebration of family life week that teachings on marriage are presented from the pulpit. Again, it was found out that there was no programs for divorcees in the church since those who divorced did not stay in the church. Any developing counselors, deacons or deaconesses who are

committed to the vision and goals of the church are assessed and taken through training to become marriage counselors. It was realized that the church has been hit by the issue of divorce and some marriages in the church have ended up in divorce while others are also facing serious marital challenges. Since the church does not advocate for divorce, leaders who divorce are stripped off their leadership positions.

The researcher affirms that the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed by God Himself, is crucial in responding to the secular marriage. From the researchers own examination it can be concluded that the divorce rate is on the control. Divorce rate is rampant among the young couples (those who marry in their early ages). It can also be concluded that more and more young people are getting married from the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical churches. Nevertheless, the churches have of divorce which is attributed by to western cultural lifestyle and peer pressure. For instance some follow the soap operas which give wrong picture about marriage and the young people think what they see in these films are real, and as such when these expectations are not met their marriages lead to divorce. The other factors that cause divorce include challenges in communication, bitterness, barrenness or childlessness, adultery, desertion or abandonment, persistent conflicts and abuse.

From the researcher's findings it has come to light that the church have to lay down plans and procedures in responding and dealing with the issue of divorce. Moreover, it is sad to say that a lot of pastors and marriage counselors are ill equipped to handle the issue of divorce in their congregations.

5.2 Recommendations

Marriage is a sacred institution and should not be easily terminated by divorce. The rampant rate of which divorce has reached in our society is a reflection of how the sacredness of marriage has been dishonored. In order to uphold God's standard of monogamous lifetime marriage, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Pastors and church leaders should be well trained in the Word of God as marriage counselors. Pastors who have not had formal training should be encouraged to attend Bible Schools. The researcher believes that this will contribute to their knowledge and broaden their limit in the teaching of marriage. It will further help them to develop better understanding on certain key marital issues so that they can offer good counseling to people who find themselves in marital crisis. Church leaders should pursue courses in exegesis and hermeneutics in order to be well equipped for better and accurate interpretation of the Word of God, especially Scripture texts that deal with the issue of divorce.
2. Churches must devote time to teach on marriage as they teach on topics such as salvation, transformation, blessing and so on. Most sermons on marriage are preached during wedding ceremonies and special marriage seminars. The subject of marriage and divorce should be taught more frequently in churches.
3. The church must play a lead role in educating the youth and married couples on issues related to sex. Sex education in marriage must be given much attention during counseling. This will go a long way to help married partners to be satisfied with each other and to avoid extra marital affairs, thereby curbing the issue of divorce. This can clearly be seen from the assertion of the lawyer in charge of marriage and divorce at the end in divorce at their end is as a result of sex problem.
4. Counseling should be taken more seriously in the Churches. Emphasis must be laid on both pre-marital and post-marital counseling and this should be done frequently. The researcher is of the view that the church should institute post-marital counseling whereby couples will continue at least for the first year to receive counseling and some oversight and to get couples to understand why they need to continue to submit to the Word of God. In this regard Christian marriage counselors in Ghana should develop marriage seminars at regular intervals where the marriage couples and 'would be' couples would come and learn more about the institution of

marriage, their prospective roles in marriage and the challenges in marriage. This could help identify and solve a potential issue that could lead to divorce.

5. The youth should be taught and encouraged to establish themselves in their chosen professions before making marriage commitments so as to minimize the incidents of divorce among young couples.

6. The high cost of marriage must be addressed by the church. This is because many marriages that have lasted long were not because the couples were rich. Making marriage simple and less expensive should be encouraged.

7. Finally, the clergy should make it a point to encourage married couples to stay united in love, forgiving each other and living out the principles of marriage as enshrined in Scriptures.

8. The high cost of marriage needs to be addressed by ministers and church leaders. This is because many marriages that have lasted long were not because the couples were rich. Making marriage simple and less expensive should be encouraged by the church.

Nobody should put asunder in the marriage and the couples should together in the times of all conditions, being poor or rich, in good health conditions and sick, weather in the times of with or without anything the two should learn to live together.

There is the need for the church to step out and be proactive to address this crisis in Christian marriages since the church is supposed to be the salt and light of the world.

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