

THE EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON CHRISTIAN HOMES

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Abstract

The effect of divorce on Christian homes is a complex and multifaceted issue that influences dynamics. Biblical relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:25-33; Deut 24:1-4), emphasizing commitment, it can challenge these spiritual ideals and introduce emotional, psychological, and social repercussions. Emotionally, children and spouses may experience grief, loss, and spiritually, divorce can lead to feelings of guilt or shame, especially in communities where marital fidelity is highly valued, possibly causing individuals to question their worth or relationship with God. Sometimes resulting emphasize forgiveness and restoration despite the difficulties. Churches often play vital roles in providing support, counseling, and guidance to families navigating divorce, aiming to foster hope and spiritual renewal. Overall, while divorce effects on Christian homes, it also presents opportunities for forgiveness, growth, and reaffirmation of faith in God's ongoing love and mercy.

Keywords: Relationship; Commitment; Counselling; Emotion; Love; Forgiveness; Growth

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a process of terminating a marriage or marital union. It can also be a legal dissolution or annulment of a marriage by a court or other competent body. No couple goes into a marriage thinking that they will be the ones who will not make it, certainly, at weddings Christian couples usually thought that they were promising a love that will last a life time, later for reasons they may not fully understand, that dream seems shattered.

Divorce is becoming a common event in the lives of many people even Christians. It is easier to dissolve marriages and less stigma is attached to divorced people. However for many especially Christians divorce remains a negative and traumatic experience. Not only does divorce affect the divorcing couple even children from such homes suffer.

In the past, concern has been focused on the effects of divorce on the society but lately there has been a growing interest in the effects of divorce on Christian homes. This seminar is concerned with the effect of divorce on both the children, parents and other members of the Christian home.

Divorce generally can be depressing, as marriage dissolves, some Christian couple may find themselves asking questions like, “should we stay together for the children’s sake? How will the divorce affect their kids, their relationship and also of great concern is how divorce affects the rest of the family. This includes parents, sisters and brothers, grandparents and in fact the extended family on both

sides. It also has consequences on family relationship, their relationship with God etc. despite the effect and consequences divorce still rears up its ugly head in Christian homes and this study is worried about this trend and asks why the increase in divorce rate among Christian Couples

MEANING OF DIVORCE

Divorce or dissolution of marriage is the process of terminating a marriage or marital union. It usually entails the cancelling or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony under the rule of law of the particular country or state, Amato P.R. (1991). Divorce can either be physical or emotional. Physical divorce is when couples who are legally married decide to stay apart and end the love that binds them together while emotional or psychological divorce is when a couple live together in the same house, sleep together, yet have nothing in common. Divorce laws vary in different countries but in most countries, it requires the sanction of a court or other authority in a legal process, which may involve issues of distribution of property, child custody, spousal support, child visitation, child support, division of debt etc. reasons for divorce vary from infidelity, incompatibility to lack of intimacy etc.

BIBLICAL VIEW ON DIVORCE

God the creator of humanity and marriage itself has laid out his plans for marriage as a lifelong union. He knows this design is the best; unfortunately the divorce rate in the Christian homes is alarming. Many Christians see nothing wrong with divorce, at least in their own particular situation but the Bible clearly addresses marriage and divorce. The creation of marriage occurred prior to sin's entrance into the world it was part of God's perfect design.

According to the Bible, Jesus emphasized the permanence of marriage and its integrity. In the book of Matthew 5: 31 -32 the Bible said “because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives but from the beginning it was not so, and I say to you: whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery”.

Before God, marriage is a lifelong relationship that should never be severed by human action. The Bible clearly stated in the book of Malachi “*...you were united to your wife by the Lord. In God's plan, when you married, the two of you become one person in His sight. And what does He want? Godly children from your union. Therefore, guard your passions! Keep faith with the wife of your youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel says He hates divorce and cruel men. Therefore, control your passions – let there be no divorcing of your wives*” Mal. 2:15 -16. (TLB). God's perfect will be the preservation of society and future generation by the preservation of marriage. 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.

THE PAULINE PRIVILEGE

The Apostle Paul added to the teachings of Jesus what is called the ‘Pauline privilege’. According to this concept Apostle Paul taught that if an unbelieving spouse leaves a believer, the believer is not bound to the marriage relationship, but is free to remarry. (1 Cor. 7:15). Except for these reasons there is no justification given in the bible for divorce. No grounds exist for divorce whether on the grounds of incompatibility, lack of communications intimacy or financial stress etc.

CAUSES OF DIVORCE

Divorce in marriage can be attributed to some of the reasons below:

- 1. Infidelity:** This is one of the most common causes of divorce. It often starts as a seemingly innocent friendship, then emotional affair and later becomes a physical; affair. Ruth Houston (2002).
- 2. Money:** Money makes people funny. According to Emmet Burns (2011), Money really touches everything, it impacts lives. Everything from different spending habits and financial goals to one spouse making considerably more money than the other, causing a power struggle can strain a marriage to a breaking point. Financial trouble can be

categorized as one of the biggest causes of divorce. Also when the couple are finally incompatible as in the case of one being a saver and the other a spender one is focused on the future while the other believes in living for today. One has no problem buying on credit while the other believes in saving up for what one wants. Overtime, this conflict may reach such heights that divorce seems to be the only logical conclusion

3. Lack of Communication: Communication is crucial in marriage and not being able to communicate effectively quickly leads to resentment and frustration for both, impacting all aspect of a marriage. Mackimon C. et al (1992). Good communication is the foundation of a strong marriage. Yelling at your spouse, not talking enough throughout the day, and making nasty comments to express oneself are all unhealthy methods of communication and are part of the reasons for divorce.

4. Constant Arguing: “From bickering about chores to arguing about kids; incessant arguing kills many relationships”. Parish S. T. (1988). Couples who seem to keep having the same argument over and over again often do so because they feel they are not being heard or appreciated. Many find it hard to see the other person’s point of view. This can ultimately be a cause of divorce. Constant arguing may also lead to complaining, blaming, criticizing, nagging and comparing spouse with another person

5. Unrealistic Expectation: Going into marriage with lofty expectation; expecting your spouse and marriage to live up to an image of what they should be can put a whole lot of strain on the other person, making him a failure before you. This could become a reason for divorce.

6. Lack of Intimacy: This is not always about sex but about not feeling connected to one's spouse. It leaves a couple feeling as though they are living with a stranger or more like roommates than spouse. This can quickly ruin a marriage. Ignoring a partner's sexual needs is also dangerous in marriage as it is one of the grounds for divorce.

7. Abuse: Both Physical and emotional abuse is a sad reality for some couples.

8. Incompatibility: This is one of the most common reasons people give for divorce. When broken down, the word signifies an abundance of different perceptions and expectations on the part of the couple. Jourad (1971) says “people commonly marry in a haze. They marry the image not the person. Later when the couple becomes aware of their many differences it may lead them to divorce”.

9. Desertion: This is also known as abundance; it could be a ground for divorce. In order for divorce, the deserting spouse must actively leave the marital home with the intent of abandonment must be for an extended and uninterrupted length of time, usually between one or two years as desertion requires proof of intent to abandon the marital

relationship, sexual relations during the abandonment period could undermine any claims that the deserting spouse intends to leave the marriage.

10. Mental Cruelty: An extreme mental cruelty could be recognized as a ground for fault base divorce if it either poses a danger to the spouses physical or mental well-being or the cruelty makes it unreasonable to expect the spouses to live together.

11. Not Consummating a Marriage: The refusal of spouses to engage in sexual relations with the husband or wife may be a cause of divorce. Willful and unreasonable withholding of sex by a spouse, coupled with other incidents of failure to perform marital duties, may be sufficient evidence to justify divorce. Also, impotency may also be a cause of divorce if it is established that one of the spouses have an incurable condition that causes impotency and therefore they were unable to consummate the marriage.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON THE COUPLES

Couples who divorce also experience adverse effects on their physical, emotional and financial wellbeing which may also in turn affect children.

- “Divorce is a stigma stamped on the name of each spouse that follows them for the entire life. They are marked as failures by the Christian community, and considered a statistic in the masses of society of people who could not

make it. Divorce must be mourned just like death, yet its results will never fade". Amato (1991). Divorce wakens the testimony of the couple, and in the eyes of the society, they can do little good in their public and Christian life if their personal lives is in shambles. Bryant, T.L. (1992)

- The suicide rate is almost three times higher among the divorced than among the lifelong spouses.
- Divorced couples are about four times as likely to have problems with depression as are the never divorced.
- Divorce may have adverse long-term emotional effects for the couple. Half of the women and one third of the men may still be very angry with their former spouses (Keyes 2002). Many of the divorced couples feel life was unfair and disappointing. (Wallenstein and Blakeslee 2004).
- According to Furstenberg F. and Cherlin A. (1994) "Divorced men have issues dealing with emotional adjustments because they relate a divorce as loss of intimacy, reduced finances, loss of social connection and possibly as though they are losing their children, especially when the custody of the children is given to the women". It has been observed that an average divorced woman has a more limited monetary support than an average married women consequently leaving women in a state where they never fully recover from the financial setback.
- Also divorced women reported significantly higher psychological distress levels in years following divorce. Juggling between making ends meet and

trying to sort her life, a woman is evidently going to go through emotional roller coaster feelings of unhappiness, loneliness and depression surround her.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Young people from intact families are much more likely to say that they attended church services regularly as children, compared to children of divorced parents.

According to Elizabeth Marquardt (2001), parents are the greatest predictor of the religious life of their kids. The way parents live out their faith walk in front of their kids plays a significant role in the likelihood that kids will become in their own faith. In other words, a strong faith that kids see lived out in their day to day lives is more likely to lead to a strong faith on the part of children. The children from divorce homes receive very little religious encouragement from their parents and get significantly less support in the area of prayer than their peers from intact families and are more likely to question their parent's faith

According to Bernard Cooke (1994) a child's early images of God come from their relationship with their own parents (particularly their fathers). In a situation where the kids feel let down or abandoned by their earthly parents, this often gets projected onto God the father thereby limiting or hindering their relationship with him or altering their view of God. Cooke goes ahead to say that

“it is primarily in loving and being loved that we begin to grasp the incredible truth that we are loved by God” what happens to children’s faith when someone they love has left? This means that as they grow up children of divorce could fall away from faith.

It is in the context of family that many children first engage in practices that mark the Christian faith like prayer and serving. It is with the parents that they say bedtime prayers, as a family that they pray over meals, in fellowship with one another they celebrate milestone like birthdays and enjoy holidays as a family. The home is seen as the “domestic church” if so, then the divorce does not just force the child to learn to live in different houses, they must also learn to adjust to the destruction of the domestic church.

Children of divorce suffer these two devastating blows in their lives following a divorce- the rupturing of their parents relationship and the destruction of their connection to the church congregation and potentially even their faith. Some of these children of divorce are also much less likely to say their mothers and father taught them how to pray and prayed with them and are much more likely to say they doubt the sincerity of their parent’s religious beliefs, do not share their parents value and perhaps many feel pain and loss evoked by the idea of God as a father or parent.

The children may lose their Christian faith and practices: Following a divorce children are more likely to abandon their faith (Felgeman, Goman and

Venacle: 1992). As adults those raised in step families are likely to be less religious than those raised by both parents (Myers 1996). Since Christian practices have benefits in areas such as sexual restraint, the child of divorce parents may lose this protection. The children may be less physically healthy.

There are many psychological effect of divorce on children. It has been found that children struggle the most after divorce.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT DIVORCE HAS ON CHILDREN

- According to King V. (2002) “Young children often struggle to understand why they must go between two homes. They worry that if their parents can stop loving one another that someday their parents will stop loving them”.
- Teenagers may become quite angry about a divorce and the change it creates. They may blame one parent for the dissolution of the marriage or may resent both parents.
- Divorce May Affect Academic Performance: Children from divorced families don’t perform as well academically. Studies show that children from divorced families also score lower on achievement tests. Parent divorce has also been linked to higher truancy and dropout rates.
- Children with divorced parents are moved quickly to take risks: “Adolescents with divorced parents are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as the use of substance and early sexual activity; such children increase the approval of pre-marital sex, Cohabitation and

divorce” Jayness (2001) girls whose father left home before they were five years old were more likely to have become pregnant before adolescent age than girls from intact homes. Elisetal (2003). The children of divorced parents are less likely to view marriage as permanent and less likely to view it as a lifelong commitment.

EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

Parent-Child Relationship: When parents’ divorce each other, another sort of divorce occurs between the parents and the children. “The primary effect of divorce is a decline in the relationship between parents and children”. Amato P. (2006). “Divorced mothers tend to be less affectionate and communicative with the children and to discipline them more harshly and more inconsistently, especially during first year following the divorce”. Wallerstain J. et al (1996). Divorced fathers especially non-custodian fathers do not fare well with their children. Divorced fathers are less nurturing and more likely to drift legal custody at the time of divorce. They also have less considerable opportunity to influence their children attitude and behavior.

Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship: Divorce negatively affects grandparents/grandchild relationship. “Paternal grandparents frequently cease to see their grandchildren as their grandchildren’s contacts with their own father diminish. Therefore, they are less likely to play a mentoring role in the life of their grandchildren than divorced maternal grandparents”. Strohschein (2007).

The fact is that divorce impacts on many other people in addition to the couple and their children. Considering the fact that siblings and parents formed a relationship with their son in-law or daughter in-law, divorce brings about a loss for them too. This person who was in the family for a period of time and with whom relationships of varying integrity were formed is no longer present. That leaves a gap that may provoke some real grieving. In fact, anger and bitterness toward their own sibling or adult child for having lost the relationship is often felt. When a divorce includes children, anxiety is created whether or not these relatives will continue to see them. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins can feel shaken up by what can become the loss of loved ones.

VARIOUS METHOD ADOPTED BY THE CHURCH TO ELIMINATE DIVORCE

1. Prioritize marriage in teachings: Marriage is the only relationship that scripture uses to illustrate the Holy Trinity ‘There is power in it as the foundation of the family. The marital relationship is the relationship we are to prioritize because we become one flesh with that individual’. Straub (2014).

Through teaching about the sanctity of marriage church leaders can cultivate a pro-marriage community. Straub goes further to say that “people are coming into marriages with their own baggage, spouse’s baggage and whatever they saw modeled by their parents-good or bad’.

2. The church also should modernize' the content of these teachings to include lessons on Finances, sexuality, communication, conflict, parenting, in-laws, leisure time, sharing of chores and mutual expectations.

The church as well should make couples and members at large to understand that:

- a. Marriage is worth the investment.
- b. You have to invest in a marriage for it to be worth the investment.
- c. Choosing your marriage partner is one of the most important human decision one can make.
- d. Most fights are over stupid things that do not matter.
- e. Most argument are resolved when both people are more concerned with a relationship than with being right.
- f. Sex is essential to a marriage relationship
- g. Practices (Like dates nights, long conversations and trips together) make marriage stronger.
- h. Never go to bed angry.
- i. Kids are awesome but do not let them come between you and your spouse.
- j. You need Jesus.

CONCLUSION

This seminar was carried out for the purpose of accessing “the effects of divorce on Christian homes”.

Attempts were made to determine the extent to which divorced homes affect both the parents and children from Christian homes.

Marriage should be seen as a lifelong relationship that can never be severed:

This research focus on the main causes of divorce are infidelity, abuse, and lack of communication, money (finance) and incompatibility. Therefore, Christian couples who wish for permanence in their marriage should do well to avoid these things.

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