

**DIVORCE IN THE 21st CENTURY CHURCH:
CAUSES, EFFECT AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

By

FARINDE STEPHEN WONDER

REG NO: DTS/CED/2023/2024/04

JUNE, 2026

**DIVORCE IN THE 21st CENTURY CHURCH:
CAUSES, EFFECT AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

By

FARINDE STEPHEN WONDER

REG NO: DTS/CED/2023/2024/04

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEGREE IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

JUNE, 2026

APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation has been approved, having satisfied the conditions for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD) in Christian Education of Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Nigeria, affiliated with Harvest Bible University, Los Angeles, California, United States of America.

Dr. Onuoha Fidelis Ebere
Supervisor

Signature

Date



Dr. Dokubo Abiye Kaizer
Dean of Studies/ Student Affairs

Signature

Date: 21/7/2026



Professor Joselito Aguid

Signature

Date: 21/7/2026

Rector



Dr. Wotogbe-Ozuzuma Igwechi Hope

External Examiner

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this Dissertation was written by FARINDE STEPHEN WONDER with the registration number DTS/CED/2023/2024/04, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD) in Christian Education Studies of Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Nigeria, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, Los Angeles, California, United States America.

Dr. Onuoha Fidelis Ebere
Supervisor

Signature

Date



Dr. Dokubo Abiye Kaizer
Dean of Studies/ Student Affairs

Signature

Date: 21/7/2026



Professor Joselito Aguid

Signature

Date: 21/7/2026

Rector



Dr. Wotogbe-Ozuzuma Igwechi Hope

External Examiner

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to the Almighty God, the Author and Finisher of my faith. To Him alone be all the glory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give glory, honour, and adoration to the Almighty God, without whom this Dissertation would have been impossible. He has been my help in ages past, my sustainer at present, and my hope in the years to come.

I widely acknowledge the effort of my Dissertation supervisor, Dr. Onuoha Fidelis Ebere, who was patient enough to guide and correct my errors. God bless you, real good sir.

I give my sincere appreciation to all my lecturers, my daddy Prof. G.S Chukwuemeka, Prof. Joselite Aguid, Dr (Mrs.) Kanadi Gava, etc. May God Almighty bless you all (Amen).

I gratefully acknowledge the effort of my wife, Pst. (Mrs.) Farinde Oluwapelumi Abiodun, for her love, affection, devotion, and support from cradle to date, especially during my years of study.

I will not forget the support of my able, lovely younger brother, Engr. Funsho Peter Farinde for his great support. May the Lord continue to uphold and bless you.

I also appreciate all my family members Pst. Johnson Daniel, Pst. Sunday Farinde, Engr. Funsho Farinde, Min. Gbenga Adekeye and Mrs. Nike Adekeye. May God take you all to greater heights in life.

In conclusion, my heartfelt gratitude goes to everyone that has made my success story in one way or the other that time and space will not permit me mention. God will reward your good gestures toward me (Amen).

ABSTRACT

Divorce within the 21st century Church reflects both internal spiritual challenges and external cultural pressures, raising concerns about the Church's witness to marriage as a lifelong covenant. This abstract examines key causes, consequences, and biblically grounded responses. Causes include the influence of secular individualism and relativism, which weaken the biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant before God. Other factors are inadequate premarital preparation, poor communication, unresolved conflict, financial stress, infidelity often facilitated by digital technology, and the normalization of divorce in society. Spiritual decline in homes marked by neglect of prayer, Scripture, and Mutual submission further erodes marital stability. Effects extend to individuals, families, and the Church. Psychologically, divorce often produces grief, guilt, and loss of identity. Children face emotional distress and increased risk of spiritual disengagement. Congregationally, mishandled cases create division, stigma, and reduced trust in pastoral leadership. Corporately, high divorce rates undermine the Church's testimony of Christ's faithful relationship with His Church. Suggested solutions require a proactive, grace-centered approach. The Church should strengthen premarital and marriage discipleship through biblical counseling and mentoring. Pastors must create safe environments for confession, reconciliation, and restoration while upholding scriptural truth. Consistent teaching on Covenant, forgiveness, and the Spirit's role in sustaining marriage is essential. Finally, structured pastoral care for divorced persons ensures they are supported without marginalization. The church must uphold biblical standards on marriage while offering redemptive care. A return to covenant theology, coupled with compassionate discipleship, provides the most effective path for prevention and healing.

Keywords: Communication; Intimacy; Counselling; Discipleship; Reconciliation; Expectations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover Page	i
Title Page	ii
Approval Page	iii
Certification Page	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract	viii
Table of Contents	ix

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	2
1.3 Purpose of the Study	4
1.4 Significance of the Study	8
1.5 Scope of the Study	12
1.6 Methodology and Sources of Data	16
1.7 Conceptual Clarifications	17

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework	19
2.2 The Meaning of Divorce	21
2.3 Origin of Divorce	25
2.4 Types of Divorce	33
2.5 Contrast on Religious Perspectives on Divorce	36
2.6 Beliefs of Different Religions About Divorce	52
2.7 Existing Pastoral Models for Marriage Restoration.....	56

CHAPTER THREE: THE INFLUENCE OF DIVORCE

3.1 Causes of Divorce	64
3.2 Effect of Divorce	75
3.3 Effect of Divorce on Children.....	76
3.4 Effect of Divorce on Couple.....	82
3.5 Effect of Divorce on Family Relationship.....	88
3.6 Effect of Divorce on Society.....	94
3.7 Pauline Privilege.....	99
3.8 Remedies of Divorce	111
3.9 Steve Dick's Theory of Divorce.....	113

CHAPTER FOUR: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

4.1 Marriage and Divorce in the Bible	114
4.2 Marriage Divorce in the Old Testament.....	119
4.3 Marriage Divorce in the New Testament.....	126
4.4 Effect of the Fall of Man on Marriage	133
4.5 God’s Original Design for Marriage	142

CHAPTER FIVE: RATE OF DIVORCE IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

5.1 Divorce on the Twenty First Century Church.....	149
5.2 The Rate of Divorce in the Twenty First Century Church.....	150
5.3 Church Perspectives on Divorce.....	163
5.4 Approaches to Divorce.....	170
5.5 Reasons Why Divorce Rate is High in the Church Today.....	181
5.6 The Church as Custodian of Marriage in Society.....	188
5.7 Biblical Mandate, Theological and Historical Proof	197
5.8 How the Early Church and Church Fathers Handled Divorce.....	201

CHAPTER SIX: THE CONCEPTS OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

6.1 God's Mind Towards Divorce.....	206
6.2 Misunderstanding of The Concept of Divorce	208
6.3 The Consequences of Divorce on the Church	211
6.4 The Role of the Church in Proffering Solutions to Divorce.....	221

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary	244
7.2 Conclusion	245
7.3 Recommendation	246

BIBLIOGRAPHY	247
---------------------------	------------

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Divorce has become increasingly visible within the 21st-century Church, mirroring trends in wider society. While marriage was established in Scripture as a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, many Christian marriages now end in separation. According to John M. Gottman (1999), factors include cultural individualism, weak premarital preparation, poor conflict resolution, financial pressure, infidelity often enabled by digital technology, and a decline in intentional discipleship in the home. The result is a gap between the Church's teaching on marriage and the lived reality of many members.

How It Can Be Addressed

1. Strengthen pre-marriage and marriage discipleship: Equip couples with biblical teaching on covenant, roles, communication, and forgiveness through premarital counseling and ongoing marriage mentoring.
2. Foster a culture of confession and restoration: Create safe spaces where couples can address sin, seek reconciliation, and receive pastoral care without shame or judgment.
3. Teach and model biblical conflict resolution: Train leaders and laypeople to apply Scripture to anger, pride, and unresolved hurt.

4. Provide post-divorce care: Offer pastoral support for those affected, upholding truth while extending grace, so individuals are not isolated from the body of Christ.

Why the Topic Is Important

Marriage is used in Scripture as the primary metaphor for Christ's relationship with the Church. According to Steven M. Harris (2023), when Christian marriages fail, it weakens the Church's witness to a watching world and harms families, especially children. Addressing divorce faithfully matters because it protects the sanctity of marriage, preserves the Church's credibility, and demonstrates that the gospel brings both truth and healing to broken relationships.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is heartbreaking and faith-clouding to learn about the rate at which the church is stampeded by various outbursts of divorce. Applications for divorce are in various committees, waiting for the sanction and/or pronouncement of the agencies concerned. As the Bible would advise "let him that has ears, let him hear". And to add to that, let those that have eyes, see. The damages caused by divorce are not farfetched. Many embrace it without proper consideration of its challenges.

A lot of persons have been misguided; by so called sympathizers; friends, parents, relatives and neighbors. Proper consultations are not made before resorting to divorce, and many are unaware of what it will cause.

Akande (2001) observes that ex-husbands and ex-wives who lived together in peace and unity have thrown their marriage vows in the trash and turned into sudden foes. Some vomit venom on the one who was their only love. Others engage in open fights. Too many others were engaged in the Cold War. Some divorces climax their hatred by hiring someone or some people to kill their ex-spouse. Most of the time, their children are brought into this battle instead of being given love.

Divorced parents have deprived a lot of their children of parental care and training. These children who need guidance, love, or discipline, financial support, a peaceful home to properly harvest what God deposited in them, have all been denied it. Instead of teaching them love, divorce will teach them how to make enemies. Lots of these children find it difficult to maintain a good relationship, and very likely, their marriage might end in divorce.

The result of divorce is turning society into a crime zone. Since these children lack parental support, they would see by engaging in theft (armed robbery), rape, and other becomes touts. The man whose finances have been cut, so he can support his ex-wife will either likely commit suicide or have a reduced work efficiency, owing to the emotional effect of divorce. The society becomes a place filled with fear of kidnapping, bullying, or probable assassination.

Divorce has also left the church in a confused state, and consequently lost the influence it had on society and individuals. Lots of occultists who came to receive

salvation for their souls have been lost and returned to their old lives. They were disappointed that a clergyman could divorce on the instruction of the so-called Holy Spirit. The sinner concludes that if the Holy Spirit can ask someone to divorce, then he cannot save him. A new convert was lost in one of the churches in Aba; he was disappointed in the church. ‘How can you sit to listen to the message of a divorcee?’ they question. It is those divorces and children of divorced parents that formed the family of our Lord Jesus Christ. Little wonder divorce has occasioned the unattainment of ecclesiastical tight-knit.

Divorce can generally be depressing. As marriage dissolves, some Christian couples 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 relationships, their relationship with God, etc. Despite the effects and consequences, divorce still rears its ugly head in Christian homes, and this study is worried about this trend and asks why the increase in divorce rate is increasing among Christian Couples.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Discouraging divorce and reducing the rate in the 21st Century Church and Society is the primary reasons of this study: The Biblical Approach

Divorce is common in the 21st century, both inside and outside the Church. The biblical witness, however, presents marriage as a lifelong covenant and consistently discourages separation except in narrow, defined circumstances. The goal is not legalism but the protection of what God designed and the pursuit of restoration where brokenness exists.

1. Marriage as a Divine Covenant, Not a Contract

Biblical basis: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate”.

In the 21st century, according to David Chiriboga (1991), marriage is often treated as a contract that can be dissolved when personal fulfillment fades. Scripture frames it as a covenant sealed before God. Covenants are based on commitment and faithfulness, not feelings or convenience. When the Church teaches this, it raises the stakes and discourages impulsive divorce. Society benefits because stable marriages reduce poverty, improve child outcomes, and strengthen communities.

2. God's Stated Hatred of Divorce

According to Stephanie Coontz (2005) this verse doesn't condemn divorced people, but it shows God's view of divorce as a violent rupture of a covenant. In a culture that normalizes "irreconcilable differences," the Church must reintroduce the seriousness of vows. Preaching, counseling, and premarital teaching should emphasize that divorce wounds all parties and contradicts God's design for fidelity.

3. Limited Biblical Grounds and the Priority of Restoration

Andrew J. Cherlin (2009) states that Jesus and Paul acknowledge that sin can break a marriage covenant. Sexual immorality and abandonment are presented as grounds where divorce is permitted, not commanded. Even then, the trajectory of Scripture is toward reconciliation where possible: "Let not the wife depart from her husband... but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband". Discouraging divorce means the Church should exhaust all avenues of repentance, counseling, and mediation before separation is accepted. Pastors should resist treating divorce as the first option for conflict, abuse, or dissatisfaction.

4. Practical Ways the Church Can Discourage Divorce

- 1. Strengthen Premarital Discipleship:** Teach couples the covenant nature of marriage, biblical roles, conflict resolution, and finances before vows are made. Most divorces trace back to issues present before marriage.

2. **Model and Teach Forgiveness:** “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you”. A church that doesn’t teach forgiveness cannot sustain marriages.
3. **Provide Ongoing Marriage Care:** Mentoring, small groups, and marriage retreats give couples tools and accountability. Isolation is a leading factor in marital breakdown.
4. **Address Sin Directly but Graciously:** Adultery, addiction, and abuse must be confronted biblically. Restoration is pursued, but protection of the innocent is maintained [Gal 6:1].
5. **Reject Cultural Assumptions:** The Church should not mirror society’s view that personal happiness outweighs covenant faithfulness. Preach against the “throwaway culture” that extends to marriage.

5. Why This Matters for Society at Large

Marriage stability is linked to measurable social goods: lower rates of child poverty, better educational outcomes, reduced crime, and improved mental health. When the Church upholds marriage, it contributes to the common good. More importantly, marriage reflects the gospel. “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church”.

John Kelly (2002) states if the Church capitulates to divorce culture, it loses its witness. If it holds to Scripture with both truth and grace, it becomes a place where

broken marriages can be healed and where society sees an alternative to disposable relationships.

In conclusion discouraging divorce in the 21st century requires returning to the biblical view of marriage as a covenant, teaching it clearly, and creating a church culture where repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are possible. Divorce is not unpardonable, but it is never God's ideal. The Church's role is to guard marriage, help couples keep their vows, and point both the church and society back to Christ's faithfulness as the model for every marriage.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is in two forms, the theoretical and practical.

1. Theoretical Significance

According to Michele Harwood (1993) theoretical significance refers to how the study contributes to knowledge, concepts, and existing literature in theology, sociology, psychology, and family studies.

a. Advancing the Theology of Marriage and Covenant

The study tests and refines biblical and theological models of marriage in a contemporary context. While Scripture presents marriage as a lifelong covenant, the 21st century has seen shifts in cultural attitudes toward marriage, individualism, and divorce. Research on causes and responses within the Church provides empirical data on how these theological ideals are

lived out or challenged. It helps clarify the gap between doctrine and practice and contributes to the ongoing development of practical theology.

b. Extending Family Systems and Social Theory

Divorce does not occur in isolation. The study draws on family systems theory, social exchange theory, and stress-process theory to explain how individual, marital, and congregational factors interact. By examining church-specific variables like pastoral counseling, church discipline, and community support, the research extends general sociological theories to the faith community context. This allows scholars to compare secular and religious populations and identify where religious social capital buffers or fails to buffer marital stress.

c. Contributing to Empirical Literature on Religion and Family Stability

Much literature on divorce focuses on secular populations. Studies specific to the Church in the 21st century are limited and often outdated. A mixed methods study generates data on prevalence, predictors, and lived experiences that can be compared across denominations, regions, and time periods. It fills a gap in the literature on how digital culture, economic pressure, and changing gender roles affect Christian marriages.

d. Building Theory on Church Intervention Effectiveness

The study evaluates which church-based interventions correlate with lower divorce rates and higher marital satisfaction. This contributes to intervention theory by identifying mechanisms of change within religious settings, such as accountability structures, mentoring, and theology of forgiveness. It helps develop middle-range theories about how religious institutions influence family outcomes.

2. Practical Significance

Practical significance refers to how the findings can be applied to improve real-world outcomes for individuals, families, and the Church.

a. For Church Leadership and Pastors

The study provides evidence-based insights for pastors and elders who counsel couples and set church policy. By identifying the most common causes of divorce in their context, leaders can prioritize training, sermon series, and counseling resources. If data show that a lack of follow-up after counseling is a key failure point, churches can implement structured aftercare programs. Findings also help leaders respond with both biblical fidelity and pastoral sensitivity, avoiding either legalism or permissiveness.

b. For Couples and Families

The research highlights preventable risk factors and protective factors. Premarital couples can benefit from knowing which issues predict marital breakdown, allowing them to address them early. Married couples gain awareness of warning signs and practical strategies reported to be effective by others. For divorced individuals, the study documents experiences of stigma and support, informing how churches can create pathways for healing and reintegration.

c. For Church Programs and Ministries

Data on the perceived effectiveness of premarital counseling, marriage retreats, mentoring, and support groups help churches allocate time and finances wisely. If mentoring by mature couples shows high effectiveness ratings, ministries can be redesigned to scale that model. The study also identifies gaps in service, such as support for blended families or post-divorce pastoral care, enabling targeted program development.

d. For the Wider Community and Society

Stable marriages are linked to lower poverty rates, better child outcomes, and reduced social costs. When the Church strengthens marriages, it contributes to the common good beyond its membership. The study's recommendations can be shared with par church organizations, Christian counseling centers, and

policymakers interested in family policy. It positions the Church as a proactive contributor to social stability rather than only a reactive critic of divorce culture.

e. For Theological Education and Training

Seminaries and Bible colleges can use the findings to update curricula in pastoral care, family ministry, and counseling. Real data from the 21st-century Church makes training more contextual and relevant, equipping future leaders with both theological grounding and practical tools.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study defines the boundaries within which the research is conducted to ensure depth, manageability, and relevance of the findings. The study is delimited as follows:

1. Geographical Scope

The study is confined to the Mbaise District of the Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria. Mbaise District is made up of multiple local assemblies across the three Local Government Areas of Mbaise: Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, and Ezinihitte Mbaise in Imo State. This district was selected because it represents a concentrated population of Assemblies of God congregations with shared cultural, linguistic, and administrative structures, allowing for a coherent analysis of how 21st-century social

changes affect marriage within this specific context. The study does not extend to other districts, regions, or denominations.

2. Content Scope

The research focuses on three core areas:

a. Causes of Divorce in the 21st Century Church

The study examines factors contributing to marital breakdown among married members of the Assemblies of God in Mbaise District. These include economic pressure, communication breakdown, infidelity, domestic violence, influence of social media, changing gender roles, and inadequate premarital preparation. The study limits itself to causes that are perceived and experienced within the last 20 years, reflecting the 21st-century context.

b. Effects of Divorce

The study investigates the effects of divorce on individuals, children, families, and the church community within Mbaise District. Effects explored include psychological and spiritual outcomes for divorced members, impact on children's faith formation, stigma and social dynamics within local assemblies, and the effect on the church's witness in the community.

c. Suggested Solutions and Interventions

The study evaluates the effectiveness of existing church-based interventions such as premarital counseling, marriage seminars, pastoral counseling,

mentoring programs, and disciplinary processes. It also solicits participant recommendations for practical, biblically grounded solutions that can be implemented at the district and local assembly levels.

3. Population Scope

The target population consists of:

1. Married couples currently attending Assemblies of God churches in Mbaise District.
2. Divorced or separated individuals who are or were members of Assemblies of God churches in Mbaise District.
3. Pastors, elders, and marriage counselors serving in the district who have direct experience handling marital issues.

The study excludes members of other denominations and Assemblies of God members outside Mbaise District to maintain contextual consistency and avoid overgeneralization.

4. Time Scope

The study focuses on divorce cases and marital trends occurring from 2000 to 2025. This timeframe captures the unique challenges of the 21st century, including globalization, digital technology, economic shifts, and cultural changes that differ from pre-2000 patterns.

Historical data prior to 2000 is referenced only for comparative purposes.

5. Theoretical and Methodological Scope

The research employs a mixed-methods approach: Quantitative component which was structured by questionnaires to determine prevalence, ranked causes, and perceived effectiveness of interventions. Qualitative component that was semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with pastors and affected individuals to explore lived experiences and contextual nuances.

6. Delimitations and Limitations

Cultural delimitation: The cultural context of Mbaise, including Igbo marital traditions and communal structures, shapes the data. Results may differ in other cultural settings. The study relies on participant self-reporting, which may be affected by stigma, recall bias, or social desirability.

7. Significance of the Delimitation

Confining the study to Mbaise District of the Assemblies of God allows for:

1. In-depth analysis without the confounding variables of multiple denominations or cultures.
2. Practical recommendations that district leadership can implement immediately.
3. A case study that can inform similar districts facing comparable challenges in the 21st century.

Summary:

This research is scoped to examine the causes, effects, and solutions to divorce within the 21st-century context of the Mbaise District of the Assemblies of God Church, using a mixed-methods design focused on members, pastors, and counselors from 2000 to 2025. The findings will be directly applicable to the district's ministry practice while contributing to broader discussions on marriage and divorce in the Nigerian Pentecostal church.

1.6 Methodology and Source of Data

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative sources, otherwise called mixed methods research. The quantitative method deals with the interviews of some married and divorced parents/individuals in the church about the causes, effects, and suggested solutions of divorce in the 21st century, and the impact of divorce on the family, relations, church, and the society at large. The Christians selected for this interview are primarily from the Mbaise District of the Assemblies of God in order to use as an analysis for the church at large.

The qualitative method uses interviews and focus groups to explain the “why” and “how” behind the quantitative results. The purpose is explanation: the qualitative phase explains and contextualizes the statistical findings from the quantitative study for achieving causes, the effects of divorce in the 21st century, and to suggest solutions. Precisely, the work makes use of mixed-methods research methodology.

1.7 Conceptual Clarifications

In the 21st-century church, divorce is recognized as a multifaceted issue influenced by social, psychological, spiritual, and cultural factors. It is not merely a moral failing but often a complex result of various stressors, such as mental health challenges, substance abuse, and financial pressures.

Traditional biblical views, such as those found in Matthew 19:3-9, Emerson Eggerichs (2004) states that marriage is a sacred covenant meant to be lifelong. However, contemporary theological interpretations may consider contexts like abuse, abandonment, or irreconcilable differences, advocating for compassionate pastoral responses rather than rigid condemnation.

Recognizing mental health as integral to marital stability, churches increasingly focus on education and support for mental wellness. Divorce may sometimes be seen not as a failure, but as a necessary step toward healing for individuals suffering from mental health issues.

Andrew J. Cherlin (2009) added that preventative measures include marriage counseling, premarital education, and community programs aimed at strengthening communication, conflict resolution, and emotional resilience.

The church's role is to support divorced individuals through reconciliation efforts, recovery programs, and ongoing pastoral care, emphasizing forgiveness, healing, and hope.

Societal changes, such as increased acceptance of diverse relationship structures and evolving views on marriage, influence how the church addresses divorce in contemporary settings. The church must balance doctrinal beliefs with pastoral sensitivity, ensuring policies are inclusive and supportive of individuals facing divorce, without stigmatization.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework

This chapter deals with the opinions of scholars on various aspects of divorce. It discusses it along the following subheadings: Nature of divorce, meaning and origin of divorce, History of divorce, types of divorce, causes of divorce, divorce from religions perspective Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, A.T.R, and Christianity, divorce from a secular perspective, effects of divorce, remedies to divorce, and summary of literature review.

Divorce, also known as 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. Grissom, Steve, and Leonard Kathy (2005).

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. Leslie (2007).

The Institution of Marriage was designed by God for man and woman to live in a lifelong covenant. God gave marriage to Adam and Eve as a gift. According to Alan Booth (1997), marriage is not just for convenience, nor is it brought about by any culture. According to Genesis 2:18 KJV, “And the Lord said It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him.” For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

Marriage has three essential phases according to Jay E. Adams (1980). (1) A man leaves his parents and, in a public act, promises himself to his wife; (2) the husband and wife are bound by taking responsibility for each other’s success and by loving the mate above all others; (3) the two become one flesh in the intimacy and resolution of sexual intercourse that is reserved for marriage. “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it comes to pass that she find no favor in his eyes because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.” (Deuteronomy 24:1) “Whosoever putteth away his wife and marries another, committed adultery: and whosoever marries her that is put away from her husband committed adultery.” Most church leaders of Jesus' time permitted a man to divorce his wife for almost any reason. Jesus’ teaching about divorce went beyond Moses. Stricter than any of the current

schools of thought, Jesus' teaching shocked his hearers, just as they shock present readers. Jesus says in no uncertain terms that marriage is a lifetime commitment. To leave your spouse for another person may be permitted, but it is adultery in God's eyes.

2.2 The Meaning of Divorce

Divorce could be described as the dissolution of marriage. It is derived from the Latin word "*Divortum*". The concise thesaurus defined it as 'the legal ending of a marriage'. Berger (1973) sees divorce as "the final termination of a marital union, canceling the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between two parties"¹. In most definitions as mentioned, one re-occurring word is dissolution of marriage. Enret (1999) again defines it as "formally putting an end to an already existing and recognized union between two adults of different sexes" It is also worthy of note that divorce does not mean separation, since it is legally or formally put to end, however, it includes separation. Having given a few definitions, it is proper to trace its roots.

Whether denotative or connotative in meaning, divorce is not an ideal situation for either intending or married couples. Like every major life change, divorce can be a stressful experience. Fritsch (2013) opines that "the meaning of every word is tightly linked to its origin.

Dimensions, and Scholarly Perspectives

Divorce is not just a legal event. It is a social, psychological, theological, and economic process. How scholars define it shapes how churches, counselors, and policymakers respond.

1. Legal Definition

In law, divorce is the formal dissolution of a marriage by a court or recognized authority, terminating the marital status and releasing both parties from marital obligations.

Key elements:

- Termination of legal rights and duties of marriage
- Resolution of property, custody, and support
- Legal recognition of single status, allowing remarriage

Source: American Bar Association, Family Law Section.

2. Sociological Meaning

Sociologists define divorce as the breakdown of the social institution of marriage and the restructuring of family relationships.

Causes: Goode 1962 identified rising individualism, economic independence of women, and weakened stigma.

Effects: Cherlin 2009 describes divorce as a “revolving door” where marriage is entered and exited more easily, affecting family stability and child outcomes.

3. Psychological Meaning

Psychologists view divorce as a process of disengagement and grief, not a single event.

Steve Duck's 4-phase model:

1. **Intrapsychic phase:** One partner experiences grievance internally
2. **Dyadic phase:** Partners confront each other and negotiate
3. **Social phase:** Announcing the breakup to others
4. **Grave-dressing phase:** Making meaning of the relationship's end

Impact: Amato 2000 found that divorce correlates with increased risk of depression, lower income, and reduced well-being for adults and children, though effects vary by conflict level.

Authors: Steve Duck, Human Relationships, 1999 Paul R. Amato, "The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children," Journal of Marriage and Family, 2000

4. Theological Meaning

In Christian theology, divorce is the rupture of a covenant intended to reflect God's permanent commitment to His people.

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permits a certificate of divorce but frames it as concession to "hardness of heart." Malachi 2:16 states "I hate divorce."

New Testament: Jesus in Matthew 19:3-9 affirms Genesis 2:24 and permits divorce only for porneia. Paul in 1 Cor 7:10-16 prohibits divorce among believers but allows release in abandonment by an unbeliever.

Tim Keller (2011) argues that marriage is a covenant, not a contract, making divorce a violation of the image of Christ and the church. Gordon Fee and Anthony Thiselton interpret Paul's "not bound" as release from marital obligation, not a mandate to remarry.

5. Economic Meaning

Economists define divorce as a reallocation of household resources and a shock to household income.

Findings: Divorce reduces household income by 20-40% for women and children in the short term. It also affects labor force participation and wealth accumulation. Linda Waite & Maggie Gallagher (2000), *The Case for Marriage*, Saul Hoffman & Greg Duncan (1988) "What Are the Economic Consequences of Divorce?" *Demography*.

6. Integrative Meaning

Divorce is best understood as a multi-layered event:

1. Legal layer: Termination of marital status
2. Social layer: Breakdown of family roles and networks
3. Psychological layer: Process of grief, identity renegotiation, and adjustment

4. Theological layer: Violation or release of a covenant, depending on tradition

5. Economic layer: Redistribution of resources and life chances

Carroll & Doherty 2003 argue that effective responses must address all five layers, not just the legal one. Premarital education, counseling, and post-divorce support target the psychological and social layers to reduce harm.

Divorce means more than a court decree. It is the collapse of a legal, social, psychological, theological, and economic system. Understanding all five dimensions helps churches and counselors move beyond legalism to prevention, restoration, and care.

2.3 The Origin of Divorce

The concept of divorce is traced to the marriage institution. It all began when God made Adam sleep, so that Eve was made from his ribs. God had made Eve having in mind that “it is not good for a man to be alone. Therefore, marriage was God’s plan, just as divorce is an arrangement out of marriage.

Gaedes, (1985) enunciates that “less than a generation ago, married people knew little about the word of the formerly married; it was a semi – secret society, but in recent years, divorce has become so common, so much more approved, and so widely discussed ...”⁵ In a related analysis, Goode (1956) adds that “although this response in modernity is reasonable, it is also highly problematic.”

The origin of divorce also dates back to ancient civilizations.

- **Ancient Mesopotamia:** The Code of Hammurabi (1754 BCE) had laws governing divorce, focusing on property and compensation.
- Ancient Greece and Rome: Divorce was allowed, often with restrictions and social stigma.
- Jewish Tradition: The Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) permitted divorce with a written notice.
- Roman Catholic Church: Initially prohibited divorce, later allowed annulments.
- Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther and others advocated for divorce as a last resort.

Broemmel (2009, PP: 85) wrote: “Widely utilized today, divorce as an institution is traced back (to) several thousand years at least... During antiquity, rituals developed to bring an end to a marriage.” Divorce could be said to have been traced to the Garden of Eden, where God divorced man because of sin. However, He had sought reconciliation ever since, which was consummated at the cross of Calvary.

History of Divorce Across the Globe: According to Broemmel (2009), “oftentimes considered the cradle of civilization, Mesopotamia is the birthplace of divorce; the first written directives about divorce are found in the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon. “Though the practice had begun before the birth of the first written code”. This could be a development of what Moses instructed Israelites who wished to do

away with their unfaithful wives: unfaithfulness is the only reason to divorce one's wife, as the teachings of Moses and Christ point frankly. However unfaithful the wife is, God said I hate divorce. Hornsby (2005, PP: 105) adds that:

“In the historical development of divorce, at the height of the ancient Greek city-states, divorce was widely accepted and practiced. The practice of divorce extended around the known world through the conquests of the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, the practice was not as acceptable as the case earlier in Greece.

Corners (1992) adds that “divorce rates rose steadily from the 1870s to the 1960s, with marked spikes after each world war, then accelerated from the 1960s 80s, then stabilized again”.

From 1960 to 1983, divorce became more popular than ever, and became something that just anybody could venture into. Good (1957) observes that “divorce laws were liberalized and expanded, the notion of fault was undermined in many codes, divorce was made more accessible, and there is evidence of public pressure for even more liberal divorce laws”. Emily (2011) postulates that “in many developed countries, divorce rates increased markedly during the twentieth century. Among the nations in which divorce has become commonplace are the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Consequently, a number of countries have, since the 1970s legislature to permit divorce, including Italy (1970), Portugal (1975), Spain (1981), Ireland (1996), and Malta (2011). Only the following countries do not permit divorce: the later

Philippines (though Muslims have the right to divorce) and Vatican City (an ecclesiastical state, which has no procedure for divorce).

Divorce does not have a developmental bone in Africa; it appears that it is a borrowed Phenomenon. As the West is contributing to the development of Africa, it has imported its culture and ideologies. But it appears that borrowing of ways of life is a welcomed development to the English, we have borrowed (words like) priest, church, presbytery, Bishop, theology, and synod from Greek, and Virgin, Pulpit, preach, lectern, scriptures, sanctify, justify, predestine, and congregation from Latin. However, borrowing is a dangerous business.

Cherlin (1992), while writing on the rate at which it has eaten up society, observes that “not until 1970, for the first time in our nation’s (America's) history, more marriages ended by divorce rather than by death”¹⁰. Hunt and Hunt, describing the ruin divorce has done to marriage, observed that “the lucky ones are the few whose marriages merely fade away like old photographs left in sunlight, until there is nothing left but a pale ghost of the original relationship”. In order to save themselves from the shame and trauma of divorce, sociologist Goode observed that “no wonder many men and women come to feel that homicide is cleaner and neater than divorce”.

Historical, Legal, and Theological Perspectives

Divorce did not begin in the modern era. Its origins trace back to ancient Near Eastern law, Roman practice, and early Christian theology, with each stage shaping how divorce is understood today.

1. Origins in the Ancient Near East and Scripture

Ancient Near East.

Divorce was practiced in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel centuries before Christ. Codes like the Code of Hammurabi allowed divorce for infertility, adultery, or neglect, usually with a financial settlement. The process was typically initiated by the husband, though wives could petition in some cases.

Hebrew Bible / Old Testament

The earliest biblical reference is Deuteronomy 24:1-4: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce...” John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*: The passage regulates an existing practice rather than instituting it. The “certificate of divorce” protected the woman from being claimed as an adulteress if she remarried.

David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible and Church*: The Hebrew term *ervat davar* “indecency” likely covered a range of marital faults, not just adultery. Rabbinic schools later debated whether it meant adultery only or any

cause. Malachi 2:16 condemns divorce: “I hate divorce, says the Lord. This shows a theological tension between legal permission and the covenant ideal.

2. Greco-Roman and Jewish Second Temple Period

Roman Law

In Rome, divorce was relatively easy for both husbands and wives by the 1st century BC. No fault was required; either party could declare intent to end the marriage. This influenced early Christian converts living in the empire.

Jewish Practice

First-century Judaism had two main schools:

Shammai: Allowed divorce only for sexual immorality.

Hillel: Allowed divorce for almost any reason, including burning a meal.

Josephus, Antiquities 4.8.23; Mishnah Gittin 9:10. Instone-Brewer argues that Jesus’ teaching addressed this debate directly.

3. Jesus’ Teaching and Its Origin in Genesis

Jesus’ statements in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9 ground divorce in creation theology: & gt; “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female... What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Scholarly reading:

Gordon Wenham & William Heth, Jesus and Divorce: Jesus appeals to Genesis 1-2 to reassert marriage as a lifelong covenant, limiting divorce to porneia “sexual immorality.”

Craig Keener, And Marries Another: Jesus is not creating new law but reinterpreting Torah in light of God’s original intent, challenging both Hillel’s laxity and Shammai’s narrowness.

4. Apostolic and Early Church Development

Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 distinguishes between Jesus’ command for believers and his own instruction for mixed marriages. He permits separation when an unbelieving spouse departs, calling it the “Pauline privilege.”

Early Church Fathers: Augustine, On Adultery Marriages: Argued marriage is indissoluble except by death, influenced later Catholic doctrine.

John Chrysostom: Allowed remarriage after adultery, reflecting a more pastoral Eastern practice.

Source: Anthony Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NIGTC, traces how Paul’s instructions addressed Corinth’s Greco-Roman context of mixed marriages and easy divorce.

5. Medieval and Reformation Shifts

Canon Law: The Catholic Church, from the 12th century onward, held marriage as a sacrament, indissoluble except by death. Separation a mensa et thoro “from bed and board” was allowed, but not remarriage.

Protestant Reformation: Reformers like Luther and Calvin returned to a biblical model allowing divorce and remarriage for adultery and desertion, citing Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7. This became the basis for most Protestant denominational policies.

Source: John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 1997.

6. Modern Legal Origins

Modern no-fault divorce laws originated in the 20th century. California’s Family Law Act of 1969 was the first U.S. no-fault statute, removing the need to prove fault like adultery or cruelty. Other Western nations followed in the 1970s-1980s.

Rationale: Reduce conflict, protect privacy, and acknowledge that fault-based systems often produce perjury.

Critique: Linda Waite & Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, argue no-fault laws weakened the cultural norm of permanence and contributed to rising divorce rates. Divorce originated as a regulated social practice in the ancient Near East, was debated within Jewish law, redefined by Jesus in terms of creation and

covenant, adapted by Paul for mixed marriages, and reshaped by church tradition and modern law. Each stage reflects a tension between the ideal of permanence and the reality of human failure.

2.4 Types of Divorce

Keener (1991) suggests that in various countries, divorce is seen with different eyes and approached in divergent manners, he consequently wrote: “Though divorce laws vary among jurisdictions, there are two basic approaches to divorce...” It should be noted that in some jurisdictions that do not require a party to claim fault to their partner, a court may still take into account the behavior of the parties when dividing property, debts, evaluating custody, and support. According to Kim (2013), “no matter how you slice it, divorce is expensive and time consuming”¹². Here are the types of divorce from various schools of thought.

Summary Divorce: In many states, an expedited divorce procedure is available to couples who haven’t been married for a very long time. A summary divorce involves a lot of less paper work than other types; don’t own much property, don’t have significant joint debts. Both spouses needed to agree to the divorce and one must file court papers jointly.

Uncontested Divorce: That’s one in which one and one’s spouse work together to agree on the terms of one’s divorce, and file court papers cooperatively to make the

divorce happen. There will be no formal trial, and one probably won't have to ever appear in court.

Default Divorce: The court will grant a divorce by default. If one files for divorces and one's spouse doesn't respond. According to Cornes, Andrew. (1993) the divorce is granted even though one's spouse doesn't participate in the court proceeding at all. A default divorce might happen, for example, if one's spouse has left for parts unknown and can't be found.

Fault and No-Fault Divorce: According to Emily Daskow (2011), in the old days, someone who wanted a divorce had to show that the other spouse was at fault for causing the marriage to break down. Now every state offers the option of 'no-fault' divorce. In a no-fault divorce, instead of providing that one's spouse is to blame, one merely tells the court that one and one's spouse have "irreconcilable break-down" or have suffered an "irremediable break-down" of one's relationship.

Mediated Divorce: According to John Haynes, (2000) in mediated divorce, a neutral third party, called a mediator, sits down with one and one's spouse to try to help one resolve all of the issues in one's divorce. The mediator helps one communicate with the other party until an agreement is reached.

Collaborative Divorce: According to Kolatch, (1980), collaborative divorce involves working with lawyers, but in a different way from the usual expectation. You and your spouse each hire lawyers who agree to try to settle your case. Each

party has a lawyer who is on their side, but much of the work is done in cooperation. Each agrees to disclose all the information that's necessary for faith negotiations and to meet with each other and both lawyers to discuss settlement. One will agree that if one's divorce doesn't settle through a collaborative process, one's original attorneys will withdraw and you'll hire different attorneys to take one's case to trial.

Arbitration: In line with Enret, Christopher. (1999) In arbitration, one and one's spouse agree that one will hire a private judge, called an arbitrator, to make the same decision that a judge could make, and that one will honor the arbitrator's decision as if a judge had made them.

Contested Divorce: If one and one's spouse argue so much over property or child custody that one can't come to an agreement, and instead take these issues to the judge for decision, one has what is called a contested divorce. According to Fritsch Stephen. (2013) one will go through a process of exchanging information, settlement negotiation, hearing, and if one can't resolve the case after all that, a court trial will. In summary, Contested Divorce: spouses disagree on terms. Uncontested Divorce: spouses agree on terms. No-Fault Divorce: no blame assigned. Fault Divorce: one spouse is blamed. Mediation: neutral third-party facilitates agreement. Litigation: court decides terms. Collaborative Divorce: lawyers and experts work together.

Summary Divorce: simplified process for short marriages or minimal assets.

2.5 Contrast on Religious Perspectives on Divorce

For this work to be acceptable in major world religions, there shall be enlightenment as to how divorce is embraced in other religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, African Traditional Religion, and Christianity.

Divorce in Judaism: While divorce is not favorably looked at in Judaism, it is by no means prohibited and, in certain cases, it is even encouraged. Kolatch (1980) opines that “the rabbis of the Talmud considered marriage a holy contract, and the dissolution of marriage an unholy act... in biblical law, a husband has the right to divorce his wife, but a wife cannot initiate a divorce.”

About a thousand years ago, Rebbeinu Gershom Ben Yehuda (1020–1083) declared that a husband could no longer divorce his wife without her consent (Lesthaeghe, 1989). This decision was accepted as binding by European Jewry. Before this time, the practice had always been as the Talmud specifies. The Talmud specifically says that “a man can divorce a woman because she spoils his dinner or simply because he finds another woman more attractive, and the woman’s consent to the divorce is not required.”

Lesthaeghe (1989) also notes that “Jewish law requires divorce in some circumstances: When the wife commits a sexual transgression, a man must divorce her, even if he is inclined to forgive her”. This does not mean that Judaism takes divorce lightly. Many aspects of Jewish law discourage divorce.

Locke (1993) postulates that “to prevent husbands from divorcing their wives recklessly or without proper consideration, the Rabies created complex rules regarding the process of writing the document, delivery, and acceptance. A competent Rabbinical authority should be consulted for any divorce.” For a Jewish couple to become divorced, the man must give the woman a document called a “Get,” as prescribed in the Torah (Deut. 24;1-4).

Morton and Bernice (1977) reveal that in Jewish law, “the Get was formerly known as “Sefer k’ (scroll of cutting off) in the Talmud. The Get does not emphasize the breakdown of the relationship, nor does it specify the reason for the divorce; rather, it states that the woman is now free to marry another man.” Aside from the legal considerations, a Get can provide a sense of emotional closure just as the marriage began with a Jewish ceremony; it ends with one as well. Simmons (Rabbi) postulates that the Get document is written in Aramaic... The text states the location, the man’s and the woman’s names, and a brief pronouncement that the woman is free to remarry. The man hands the authorized witnesses. There are no prayers or blessings involved.

The Get document remains in the files of the officiating Rabbi, and it is torn so that it cannot be used again. Some husbands refuse to grant the woman a Get, thereby preventing her from getting remarried. In 2012, the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) ruled that a husband has 45 days maximum to provide his wife with a Get once a

rabbinical court has ruled that one is needed. Rich adds that “if a man disappears or deserts his wife or is presumed dead but there is insufficient proof of death...

A woman in this situation is referred to as “Agunah” (literally anchored). No solution to this problem exists. To prevent this problem, it is customary in many places for a man to give his wife a conditional Get whenever he goes off to war.

Divorce in Islam: Men and women, under the terms of Islamic law (Sharia), have separate rules. When a man files for a divorce, it is called “Halaq”, but when initiated by the woman, it is known as “Khula.” Chaudry opines that “Islam does not forbid divorce, but of all the permissible things, it is the most disliked by Allah. The destruction of a family has life-long consequences, and we are advised to seek out every means of reconciliation possible”. Aalim Network wrote that “Shia and Sunni have different rules to engage in a Talat. According to Nida (1954), the three steps include:

1. **Reconciliation:** the couple is supposed to try to reconcile during the waiting period, with the help of mediators.
2. **Completion:** After the completion of the talat process, the couple is divorced; the husband is no longer responsible for the wife’s expenses, and she becomes “non-mauram for him.”

NIDA (1954) also believes it to be wrong and against various Hadiths, but accepts it as final if a man did utter it. The view on acceptability of this varies amongst the

four Sunni groups, each Talat utterance should be followed by a waiting period of three menstrual periods, for women, or three months (Iddah), when the couples are supposed to try to reconcile with the help of mediators from each family, until the third and final Talat.

It is also possible for a woman to petition a “Qadi” (judge of Muslim jurisprudence) for divorce under certain conditions. Zernike (2007) presents three conditions in which divorce will hold for the woman.

1. If the husband has not had sexual intercourse with her after marriage
2. If it is known that she is pregnant
3. If, due to the husband’s absence or imprisonment, he is not able to ascertain whether or not she is pak from Haidh or Nifas.

The Talat is the formula of repudiation; it is to be pronounced three times. The first two times the Talat is pronounced, it may be withdrawn, but the third time it is pronounced, the divorce is irrevocable. Zernike (2007) observes that there are ranges of systems specifying the requisite formalities to complete an irrevocable divorce. In countries where polygamy is permitted, there is no waiting period before the husband can remarry. The wife must usually wait three months after the third talat has been spoken before remarrying (this period is known as Iddah). Hassan points out “Three aftermaths to a divorce”:

- a. If the wife is divorced for the third time (i.e., married once, divorced once, married a second time, divorced a second time, and so on), then she becomes a haram for her former husband.
- b. Even if divorces separate a man from his wife, he has to seek her help in caring for the child or another female. If the mother agrees, he must pay for the expenses.
- c. In most Islamic states, it is generally unacceptable for a divorced woman to live alone.

In most situations, women who find themselves divorced will return to live with their parents or to the house of another close relative (O'Brien, 2001).

Divorce in Hinduism: Pamela (1997) points out that “Traditional Hindu law does not allow divorce.” Another writer, Jayaram, also postulates that “Hindu civil codes permit divorce on certain grounds. But the religion itself does not approve of divorce, because the concept is in Hinduism.” So, the fact is that, whether or not the law permits it, it is practiced and allowed.

The way a society understands marriage goes a long way to determine how they embrace or shuns divorce. Robbins (1999) reveals that “if we have understood the problems and issues concerning Hindu marriages and divorce, we will understand the concepts and beliefs attached to the... Marriage is a sacrament, sanctified in the presence of the gods.” It appears that women’s roles have been undermined in Hindu

marriages. The Dharmasastras have ordained the woman. To be cherished and worshipped everywhere and always... The man in the society has pulled her down from it and given her a very subservient and slavish role.”

It began in the Western world. Surprisingly enough, the Western philosophers, too, were not left behind in their condemnation of women. Aristotle says” Woman is to the man as the slave is to his master.... The best condition for a woman is a quiet home life in which she will be ruled by the man.” The question to the above findings is that despite the high status conferred on her in the scriptures, at what point did her decline begin, and why? Because harsh treatments were given to women, Pamela (1997) informs that “in ancient times, women in Hindu society had limited freedom. Women were bought and sold, abducted and forcibly married, and forced into slavery or prostitution.

As the institution of marriage became unquestionably the most vital societal institution, the custom of her subservience became eternal. “The law must decide as to what is meant by marriage... originally, marriage was seen in terms of contract, dissolution in terms of property, and divorce in terms of marital offence,” says Robbins. Therefore, the law must recognize that the unity of married life lies in the oneness of the husband and wife.

Pamela observes that “for the Hindus, marriage ties are irrevocable, but for the Hindu man, he can enter into several such irrevocable ties. The Hindu woman can only

enter into one such relationship”. Hinduism favored monogamy, but polygamy flourished because men married several times, often by simply taking another wife. Consequently, the fact that Hinduism discouraged divorce made very little or no difference to men.

Thornton (1985) quotes Smriti as saying that “once the institution of marriage is recognized legally, divorce must be recognized per se.” Narada and Parasara recognize the contingent situations where a woman should be permitted to remarry, namely: the husband is unheard of for a long time, or the husband is dead, or the husband adopts another religious order (including conversion), or the husband becomes impotent. She can remarry after waiting for three months. Chakraborty adds other reasons: “when the husband is excommunicated, or the husband is suffering from sinful diseases like leprosy and venereal disease, or the husband is guilty of crimes like rape, adultery, murder and incest. Kautilya explains, “When the husband leaves the wife and goes to a foreign land, if the husband is unheard of for a long time, or if the husband has withdrawn himself from the society of his wife, it amounts to desertion.” The impotency of the husband is a vital factor at all times. This reflects a picture of society where women have the right to sex and a happy marriage and have been assured against neglecting husbands. Most of these grounds are not made available to the husband, which can only mean that the husband was to

follow monogamy except in the case of adultery or mutual satisfaction, when he could cast his wife away.

However, only the reverse situation was true. There was a rising rate of polygamy on the one hand, and incidents of divorce were almost zero. The men did not really need any special reason to marry again; their physical and economic supremacy gave them an edge over the women. Hindu marriage as an institution of the family has undergone quite some changes in recent times; for many Hindus, divorce is the last desperate resort. The stigma associated with divorce is the biggest deterrent.

Divorce in A.T.R: An African proverb says: “A man without a wife is like a vase without flowers”. Marriage is an institution held in high esteem, no matter the culture one comes from. There are also many different religions represented in Africa. Many Northern Africans have been influenced by Muslim traditions, while further south, there are more Christian, Hindu, and even Jewish traditions. Orji (2013) observes that: “Traditional African religions have been passed down from generation to another orally and can be found through art, rituals and festivals, belief and customs, names of people and places, songs and dances, proverbs and myths”¹⁵. It is estimated that practitioners number around 100 million or 10% of the African population.

According to Sharon and Mackenry (1988), there are more than 1,000 cultural units in Africa, and each culture and tribe has its wedding and marriage traditions. Shorter opined that “Generalization about traditional Africa is always dangerous because of

the distances of time and space that are involved.” How far does traditional Africa co-exist with modern Africa? Or is it a thing of the past? Before turning to the family as a whole, it is worthwhile to look at the relationship between the sexes in traditional Africa. Early anthropologists believed that the status of women in any society was an index of civilization; the lower the status of women. Modern studies have proven anthropologists wrong. Shorter opined that “the status of women in traditional Africa was much higher than they imagined, and if women were still at a disadvantage, nowhere did women enjoy complete equality or inequality.

Wayne (2004) agrees that in all communities, the bride plays a very special role and is treated with respect because she is a link between the unborn and the ancestors, according to African myth. Marriage is sacred the world over; in fact, many cultures have a special totem that is designed to remind a couple that cultural and tribal differences must not be allowed in order to make a marriage succeed.

Weiner (2001) opines that “Africans generally perceive marriage as an alliance between two kingships.” Divorce is rare in traditional Africa. Enret observes that “in the olden days, two people met two times and got married on the third meeting and these marriages lasted a lifetime.” Today, couples date for three years and divorce six months after getting married. Jones opines that “modern societies put demands on African people that were not there historically. Women are expected to do everything their ancestors did (cook, clean, and raise children) as well as everything

Hollywood women do.” Nida (1954) has an opposing opinion. “Just as polygamy has been fairly frequent in traditional African Society, divorce has been rare.... Once a child has been born, the marriage is indissoluble.”

The matrimonial jurisprudence of the church’s tribunal, in line with natural law, has never accepted sterility as grounds for invalidating a marriage. This suggests that the reason for traditional African marriage was for procreation, when men needed hands in their farmlands.

Zernike (2007) reveals that in Ethiopia, the Karo people and the Amhara people negotiated their marriages by the two families. Divorce is allowed and must be negotiated as well. Priests may marry, but are not eligible for divorce. The Massai people of Kenya give women in marriage to a man she didn’t know, and who is much older than she. This too was practiced in the traditional Igbo marriage culture. They also are allowed to send their wives packing.

Akande postulates that divorce is common among the Fulani’s and very rampant in West Africa. Some tribes did regard notorious adultery as grounds for divorce. According to modern Africa, in some African countries, a wife who had a tubal litigation without her husband’s consent may be divorced.

While divorce laws have been introduced into the modern legislature of most African Countries, this does not correspond to African tradition in which divorce was almost

unknown. Sterility was considered grounds for annulment rather than for any divorce after a true marriage.

Divorce in Christianity: Divorce is a growing concern in almost every society. According to Roderick the casual altitude of divorce in the secular world is spilling into the church. However, there are divergent opinions concerning Religion and likelihood to divorce. Roderick (1991) postulates also that “a couple’s degree of religiosity is of great importance in determining the likelihood of divorce. Persons who hold any church membership are less likely to obtain divorces than are persons who are nonmembers.” Thornton also agrees with them, by writing that: “women who attend church services frequently are less approving of divorce and less likely to have changed their attitudes about divorce over the years. Consequently, they have the lowest probability of divorce.”

On the other hand, in recent religious views, long contends that “Christians tend to divorce at about the same rates as the rest of the population.” Weiner (2001) argues that “Christians are more likely to experience divorce than non – Christians.” in their statistics, they gave figures showing the percentage of a religious sect that have been divorced: Christian 34%, Jews 30%, Baptists 29%, Born – again Christians 27%, mainline protestants 25%, other Christians 24%, Mormons 24%, Atheist and Agnostics 21%, Catholic 21%, Lutherans 21%, general population 24%.

Weiner (2001) also finds that one out of eight pastors have experienced a divorce. If this is the case, does it suggest that divorce is welcomed development in Christianity? Only a few texts speak clearly about divorce. Molldrem, while reacting to Den. 24:1-4 postulates that “nowhere do the inequality of the sexes and the limitations on a woman’s freedom appear more starkly than in the matter of divorce.” There was no circumstance in which a wife might divorce her husband, whereas a husband’s right to divorce his wife at any time and for any reason was absolute. O’Brien (2001) notes that “while the prophet (Malachi 2:15-16) clearly states that God hates divorces; he also notes that God hates covering one’s garments with violence; if abuse is hated by God, then it seems it could be a legitimate reason for divorce.” Keener adds that if it is argued that claims of abuse might be used as a phony excuse for a woman to leave marriage, it should also be observed that the church’s standard against divorce has been used by husbands as an opportunity to continue abusing their wives.

There are lots of things the Bible recorded that God hates in scripture but Jesus while responding to a divine question permits divorce. Steven A. VanDyke (2023) points out a better picture of Jesus' answer in Mark 10:2-12. “He said to them “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” Mk. 2:14-12. He notes these things about this text; (1) verse 12 is unique in the gospels, reflecting

Greco Roman rather than Jewish practice, (2). No exception clause, (3) Jesus identified the reason for divorce in the divorce; divorce was not part of the order of creation. Numbers 3 and 4 together thus suggest that the point is that divorce is not part of God's will, but it is God's concession to the human condition characterized by sin.

- **Cultural Context of Jesus Teaching.** Jesus spoke in a world in which women were second class citizens at best; only a Jewish man could initiate a divorce. The Rabbis were divided over the grounds for divorce. According to Weiner (2001) the Liberal school of Hittel allowed divorce if the wife spoke too loudly in the house, if she could not cook, if she unsightly treated her husband; or if another became more interesting to the husband. The school of Shamma, which is a more conservative one, allowed divorce, only for unchastely.

Thielicke reads the Gospel as a call to repentance, in that, instead of focusing on possible reasons for divorce, Jesus points back to God's will in the beginning. From 1Cor. 7:10-16, Heslin (1985) points out that "Paul notes another situation in which divorces could be acceptable if a Christian wants divorce, Paul allows it." Note that Paul does not mention hardness of heart or chastity. His focus is on the unity of the spirit between spouses. Thus, if a husband/wife separate, they should remain single or be reconciled to each other (verses 11-12). Consequently, Blackstone commentaries in the laws of England concludes that "since husband

and wife became one person upon marriage, that oneness can only be seen as null if the parties improperly entered into marriage initially, in which the marriage does not exist.” for once it entered into properly, the Bible advises, “let no man put asunder”.

Secular Perspectives on Divorce: Berger (1973) in his often quoted definition of secularization, put thus: “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.” Berger did in fact draw a distinction between two main types of secularity; subjective secularization (removal of the religious from the consciousness of the person), and structural secularization (removal of the religion from society’s institutions).

Secularism means, amongst other things, that there should be a separation of Church and state. Some authors have argued that this separation should be for the benefit of secular individuals whilst others have argued that although the effect of separation of church and state remains arguably obscure. Locke argued “That the state did not have authority to determine matters of individual conscience.”

Having understood the secular concept by definition and description, it is fitting to look at the notion of secular divorce. Brault and Kpesowo (2001) put the secular view of divorce as: “it is as often as not inevitable, completely normal and often good for everyone involved.

Divorce Laws in the U.S.A: The 1996 Defense of marriage act passed, congress defined marriages under federal laws to refer only to a legal union between one man and one woman. Whilst the ‘for life’ requirement has always been in doubt, congress under the presidency of Bill Clinton banned any Federal recognition of same sex marriage, it has been relaxed afterwards. Ever since, the marriage institution promoted by self-liberation has constantly been attacked by divorce.

Divorce laws vary from state to state, but each state recognizes other states' laws. In 1969, California became the first to legalize no-fault divorce. Under common unilateral divorce laws (also known as no-fault divorce), either party can demand a divorce at any time and for any reason with marital assets being split evenly. Divorce courts do consider allegations of faults when children are involved. The act of divorce in the U.S. rose since no fault –divorce was legalized. The states with highest rates include Idaho, West Virginia, Wyoming, Arkansas and Nevada, (Goode, 1956).

Divorce in France: Morley opines that “divorces are pronounced upon mutual consent, upon a joint request, by fault, or by termination of common life.” In any case, the assistance of a lawyer is indispensable. To sue for divorce by mutual consent there are two possibilities.

1. Divorce upon mutual consent. Both parties file a joint request, you do not have to give the reason why you want to divorce.

2. Divorce requested by only one party and accepted by the other: only one party files for divorce, the other party accepts in principle... when your spouse is not in agreement to divorce.
3. Divorce requested for fault. There are facts to be charged to one of spouses concerning violations of the duties and obligations of marital life.
4. When you have lived apart for at least six years.
5. When mental faculties of your spouse have, for at least six years, become so altered that life together is no longer possible.

The spouse who is requesting for the divorce assumes responsibility for all the fees involved. It should be noted that Islamic Divorce is not recognized in France.

Divorce in Nigeria: According to Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “marriages in Nigeria take place under three legal systems. Islamic (Maliki school of law), Civil (Statutory law) and customary (tribal/ traditional law).” In general, marriages in the North of the country are under law, while those in the predominantly Christian south are under the statutory laws, customary law generally prevails in personal matters.”

For marriages that took place under civil war, the 1970 matrimonial causes act governed divorce. According to this Act “both the man and the woman have legal right to seek divorce, if the marriage has suffered irretrievable breakdown. The

petitioner must satisfy the court, according to immigration and Refugee Board Canada that;

1. The respondent has refused willfully to consummate the marriage
2. Since the marriage, the respondent has committed adultery and the petitioner finds it intolerably to live with.
3. Since the marriage, the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent.
4. The respondent has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of at least one year immediately preceding the presentation of the petition (among other reasons).

Th report on Human rights issues in Nigeria informs that, under the customary law, both parties are also able to seek a divorce, and that a marriage can be dissolved.

2.6 Beliefs of Different Religions about Divorce

The relationship between religion and divorce is complicated and varied. The researcher attempts to summarize the dominant views in the number of major world faiths.

Hinduism

Hindus' attitudes toward divorce vary. Divorce rarely happens but is not forbidden. The reason divorce is rare is largely due to cultural factors and attitudes and some Hindus might argue because of arranged marriage.

Hindus believe in Karma or “international action”, some Hindus disagree with divorce because it may harm and upset their children and family, others agree with divorce because if the couple are living in hatred or setting a negative example to their children this may bring bad Karmic consequences. Many Hindus who are having a marital problem will try to work out their problems as they want to keep the family together and might believe that to end a marriage means they have failed to fulfill charms

Jayarm (1996), confirms that Hindu civil code permits divorce on certain grounds. But the religion as such does not approve divorce, because the concepts are alien to Hinduism. According to the tenets of Hinduism, marriage is a sacred relationship, a divine covenant and a sacrament. Marriage is meant for procreation and continuation of family lineage, not for sexual pleasure. It is an obligatory duty of Hindu dharma which once accepted should be upheld by both the bound which cannot be dissolved through divorce on some personal or selfish grounds

Buddhism

There is no obligation for Buddhists to marry, and most Buddhists believe marriage is a choice. As long as they are both happy to do so, Buddhists are allowed to cohabit. As a result, Buddhists do not have any formal teachings on what marriage ceremony should consist of. The closest that Buddhists come to one is to hold a blessing or

celebration but there are no religious elements to the event. However, venerable Dhammarianda (2017) states that:

“If a man can find a suitable and understanding wife and a woman find a suitable and understanding husband, both are fortunate indeed”

Marriage in Buddhism comprises a civil ceremony that legally unites two people. Buddhists monks may bless marriage ceremonies. Therefore, the main content of Buddhist marriage ceremonies reflects the culture of the country the couple live in. This is more significant than religion context

Still on Buddhism, Buddhist view of marriage. Since marriage is secular, Dhammanda has said, if a husband and wife really cannot live together, instead of living a miserable life and harboring more jealousy, anger and hatred, they should have the liberty to separate and live peacefully. Vihanage (2017).

Islam

Dehlvi (2017), divorce is permitted in Islam as a last resort if it is not possible to continue a marriage. Certain steps need to be taken to ensure that all options have been exhausted and both parties are treated with respect and justice

In Islam, it is believed that marriage life should be filled with mercy, compassion and tranquility. Marriage is a great blessing. Each partner in the marriage has certain rights and responsibilities, which is to be fulfilled in a loving way in the best interest of the family. Islam believes that when a marriage is in danger, couples are advised to pursue all possible remedies to rebuild the relationship. Divorce is allowed as a

last option, but it is discouraged. The prophet Mohammad once said. “Of all the lawful things divorce is the most hated by Allah”. For this reason his first step a couple should make is to really search their hearts. Evaluate the relationship and try to reconcile. All marriages have ups and downs, and this decision should not be arrived at easily. Though Islam outlines certain steps that need to take place both before, during, and after a divorce. The needs of both parties are considered. Any children of the marriage are given top priority. Guidelines are given both for personal behavior and legal process; following these guidelines may be difficult especially if one or both spouses feel wronged or angry. Strive to be mature and just remember Allah’s words in the Quran: the parties should either hold together on equitable terms or separate with Kindness. Surah al-Baqarah, 2:229).

Christianity

David (2008) observes that Christianity is not a religion, it is a way of life anchored in Christ. So Christians must understand and follow strictly the teachings of Christ concerning divorce. What did Jesus say about Divorce?

When the Pharisees tested Jesus on this controversial issue of divorce, His response focused on “one flesh” of a married couple (Mark 10:2-9). Later, the disciples privately asked Jesus to explain his answer as was His custom, once He was alone with the disciples, Jesus understood the silent part of His teaching, He clearly stated

that marriage is to be a permanent bond between one man and one woman; to break it off and marry another is adultery.

Jesus affirmed (and still affirms) the permanence of the marriage bond, but He also acknowledged that because of the depravity of the human heart, the marriage bond might be severed under certain circumstances. What are those circumstances? That requires turning to the “exception clause” of Matthew 19:9.

“I say to you, whoever divorce his wife, except for immorality and marries another woman commits adultery”.

The Greek word Jesus used for “immorality” is the word from which we get our modern word pornography. “Immorality” in this verse is based on the word porneia. The root, porne, means “prostitute”. Porneia, when applied to illicit sexual activity among unmarried couples, is often translated “fornication”. When applied to illicit sexual activity among those who are married, porneia is often translated as “adultery”. In either case, porneia is considered immoral. Generally, the Greek term porneia refers to sexual activity that is immoral, illicit and sometimes unnatural. For this reason, some scholars interpret the term loosely and apply it to homosexuality, bestiality, incest and the like. But keeping in mind, no matter how immoral these activities are Jesus only permitted divorce for such offences He did not command it.

2.7 Existing Pastoral Models for Marriage Restoration in the 21st Century

After divorce and marital breakdown, 21st-century churches moved beyond just “teaching permanence” to active restoration models. The goal: uphold covenant

while showing grace to the broken. Here are the 6 most influential pastoral models and authors behind them:

1. BIBLICAL COUNSELING MODEL “Nouthetic and Redemptive” Core

Idea: Marriage problems are heart/spiritual problems. Restoration comes through repentance, forgiveness, and applying Scripture to thought patterns.

Key Authors and Framework:

1. Jay Adams: Competent to Counsel, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible Model: “Nouthetic Counseling” means noutheteo “admonish”. Adams rejected secular psychology. He teaches 3 steps: 1. Confront sin, 2. Offer biblical solutions, 3. Give homework. For marriage: assign “love plus respect” duties and “put off/put on”. For Divorce: Adams allows divorce for adultery plus abandonment, but pushes hard for reconciliation first.

2. David Powlison: Good and Angry [New Growth Press, 2016], Speaking Truth in Love [New Growth, 2005]

Model: “Christ-centered counseling.” Powlison, from CCEF, shifted Adams’ model to be more grace-based. He says restoration equal “idols of the heart” exposed plus Christ’s sufficiency applied.

For Divorce: Use “cross-talk” not “just fix behavior.” Couples learn to repent to God first, then each other. [Zondervan][1970][1980]

21st Century Application: Churches like Mars Hill, Redeemer NYC, and thousands of ACBC-certified counselors use this. Focus: 8-12 week intensive counseling before legal divorce.

2. SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION MODEL: “Skills plus Covenant”

Core Idea: Couples lack skills, not just holiness. Teach communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence as stewardship of the covenant.

Key Authors and Framework:

1. John Gottman: The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, What Makes Love Last? [Simon & Schuster, 2012] Mode: Gottman Institute “Sound Relationship House.” 7 levels: Build love maps, fondness, turn toward, positive perspective, manage conflict, make dreams come true, create shared meaning. Pastoral Adaptation: Mark Gungor Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage [Thomas Nelson, 2005] and Gary Smalley Hidden Keys to Loving, Lasting Marriage translate Gottman into biblical language. “Bids for connection” Eph 5:28 “nourish and cherish.” For Divorce: Gottman’s “Four Horsemen” criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling are treated as sin patterns. Restoration equal kill contempt, rebuild friendship.

2. Tim & Kathy Keller: The Meaning of Marriage Model: “Gospel-centered marriage.” Kellers use covenant theology and practical communication.

Restoration equal see your spouse as Christ sees the church: sinful but beloved.

21st Century Application: Redeemer Presbyterian runs “Marriage Course” based on this. Churches globally adapted it. [Harmony][1999] [Zondervan][2004] [Dutton] [2011]

3. RESTORATIVE THERAPY MODEL: “Emotionally Focused plus Attachment” Core Idea: Marital breakdown is attachment injury. Healing comes when couples safely express hurt and reconnect emotionally.

Key Authors and Framework:

1. Sue Johnson: Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love [Little Brown, 2008] Model: “Emotionally Focused Therapy EFT.” 3 stages: 1. De-escalate negative cycle, 2. Restructure attachment, 3. Consolidate new bond.

Pastoral Adaptation: Kenneth Sanderfer Marriage After God’s Way [B & H, 2015] and Rick & Kay Warren. The Marriage Book integrate EFT with Scripture. “Safe place” equal Ps 46:1 God as refuge.

2. Dan Allender: The Wounded Heart, How We Love with Dr. Trevor Cragoe
Model: “Attachment plus story work.” Allender says divorce often stems from childhood wounds replayed in marriage. Restoration equal tell your story, grieve, then forgive 70x7 [Matt 18:22]. 21st Century Application: The

Allender Center at Seattle School trains pastors to do “marriage intensives” for couples near divorce. [Zondervan][2006][Nav Press][1990][Water Brook]

4. RESTORATION AFTER DIVORCE MODEL: “Grace plus Reintegration”

Core Ide: When divorce already happened, church must restore people, not shame them [Gal 6:1]. Focus shifts from “saving marriage” to “redeeming people.”

Key Authors and Framework:

1. Rupert Bentley-Taylor: Divorce and Remarriage: A New, Compassionate Perspective [IVP]

Model: “Pastoral care model.” Bentley-Taylor argues church should offer “hospice care” for dying marriages and “rehab” for divorced. 4 steps: 1. Grief counseling, 2. Breaking shame [Rom 8:1], 3. Forgiveness work, 4. Discernment about remarriage [1 Cor 7:11].

For Church: Create “Divorce Care” type groups. Stop treating divorcees as 2nd-class members.

2. Caroline N. Blevins: Healing After Divorce: A Ministry of Restoration_

Model: “12-step Christian recovery.” Blevins, a United Methodist pastor, built support groups modeled on AA but grounded in Ps 147:3 “He heals the brokenhearted.” 21st Century Application: Over 1,000 US churches run

“Divorce Care” by Church Initiative. Curriculum by Steve Grissom uses Blevins’ framework. [1996] [Abingdon] [2009]

5. COVENANT RESTORATION MODEL – “Intensive plus Accountability”

Core Idea. For couples not yet divorced but in crisis. Use intensive retreats plus accountability plus church discipline to fight for marriage [Mal 2:15 “guard your spirit”].

Key Authors and Framework:

1. Jimmy Evans: Marriage on the Rock, Fight for Your Marriage

Model: “Marriage Today/XO Marriage.” 3-day “Weekend to Remember” intensives. Method: 1. Identify root idols, 2. Covenant renewal ceremony, 3. 90-day accountability plan with mentor couple.

Result: Claims 80%plus of “separated couples” reconcile after intensive. Critics say data isn’t peer-reviewed, but the model is widely used.

2. Chip Ingram: Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships

Model: “Battle plan approach.” Ingram teaches pastors to treat marital crisis like spiritual warfare [Eph 6:12]. Restoration equal fasting, prayer, cutting soul ties, renewing vows [Mark 9:29]. [T Vision][2003][Faith Words][2018][Baker][2004]

6. INTEGRATIVE/HOLISTIC MODEL – “Whole-Person plus Church System”

Core Idea: No single model works. Best 21st-century churches combine theology plus psychology plus community.

Key Authors and Framework:

1. Andreas J. Köstenberger – God, Marriage, and Family, 2nd 2010

Model: “Comprehensive pastoral theology.” Köstenberger argues church must do 4 things: Teach doctrine of marriage, provide premarital prep, offer crisis counseling, restore after failure. He calls it “cradle-to-grave” ministry.

2. John Witte Jr.: The Western Case for Monogamy over Polygamy, From Sacrament to Contract. Model: “Legal and theological integration.” Witte shows how the church and state must partner. For restoration: church handles counseling/forgiveness; the state handles legal protection, especially in abuse cases.

3. Diane Langberg: Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church Critical Model: Langberg warns restoration models must NOT force victims to reconcile with abusers. She says “safety before reconciliation”. 21st-century churches are adopting this as non- negotiable. [Crossway][2004] [Cambridge][2015] [Westminster][1997] [Brazos][2020]

6 CORE PRINCIPLES ALL MODELS AGREE ON [21st Century Consensus]

- 1. Covenant First:** God hates divorce [Mal 2:16], so church fights for marriage before filing papers.
- 2. Safety Non-Negotiable:** Abuse equal no forced reconciliation [Diane Langberg, 2020].
- 3. Early Intervention:** Gottman research: couples wait 6 years after problems start before seeking help. Church must normalize counseling at year 2, not year 12.
- 4. Grace After Failure:** Rom 8:1 “No condemnation.” Divorced people remain part of church body [Gal 6:2].
- 5. Church as Team:** Pastors can’t do it alone. Titus 2:4-5 mentor couples and trained lay counselors are essential [Köstenberger, 2004].
- 6. Gospel Centered:** All restoration points to Christ’s covenant love for the church Tim Keller 2011.

CHAPTER THREE

THE INFLUENCE OF DIVORCE

3.1 Causes of Divorce

Divorce is considered a "life-altering decision" that encompasses many ways of addressing the challenges that lead to divorce prior to the final legal decision Tanaka (2010). Most authors, Fagan & Churchill, (2012); Treas, Scott & Richards (2013) regard divorce as a permanent separation of a married couple. The sociological view of divorce is based on the notion that marriage is a social institution. Wilcox and Dew (2009). In this view certain cultural beliefs and norms (a long-term commitment, care of children and a man being the breadwinner of the family) are what constitute a marriage. When these beliefs and norms are violated, either a wife or husband is more likely to leave. Sayer, et al (2011) due to lack of social support, or because the spouse feels dissatisfied because the norms have been violated. Marriage is considered a "lifelong contract in African societies" Arugu (2014). Traditionally, divorce was not considered as an option; family members would address any dispute by judging the case on its merit and weighing all the consequences of the outcome. Divorce, which was essentially considered a "sin against God, nature, and society" Arugu (2014), could only be allowed in traditional African society if adultery had been committed, and despite all efforts to encourage the married couple to stay together. Bezuidenhout (2017) argues that it is therefore

an advantage for couples to come from similar cultural backgrounds, as this helps them in adjusting to and developing the family culture for themselves

Multiple, interlocking factors have contributed to the rapid rise of divorce in the world Ernest (2003); Makwanise & Masuku (2016). Some of these factors as revealed by South African researchers include sexual incompatibility Ganerre (2016); Tembe (2010); Preller (2014); lack of intimacy Ganerre (2016); lack of communication and social networking (Preller, 2014); marital infidelity Tembe (2014), Sexual incompatibility is one of the contributing factors in divorce. Men and women naturally tend to differ in every sphere of life (emotionally, mentally and sexually). Certain things require adjustment as the marriage progresses, i.e. children are born, health challenges arise and careers change. In most cases the transition affects a couple's sexual relationship Preller (2014). Consequently, if either party is not physically satisfied, he or she may look for a companion to satisfy his or her sexual needs. Consequently, sexual dissatisfaction may lead to divorce. King (2009) indicates that one reason given by young couples for their divorce is loss of sexual attraction and subsequent weakening of their intimate relationship. Lack of communication is another underlying cause of many divorces among young couples; failure to communicate makes it difficult for couples to resolve the financial, sexual and emotional issues affecting their marriage Benokraitis (2007).

Infidelity: This also referred to as 'adultery' and commonly known as 'cheating' on one's partner is near the top of the list of reasons for divorce among young couples. Preller (2014). It does not matter whether it is a wife or husband who is unfaithful, the repercussions can be devastating for the entire family. Various factors may lead to adultery such as lack of intimacy and communication as well as sexual dissatisfaction in marriage. Some cultural beliefs may also promote infidelity; for instance, after giving birth (during the postpartum period of sexual abstinence), a woman is expected to abstain from sexual intercourse for a specific period to recuperate Awusabo-Asarea & Anarfi (1997). The disadvantage of this practice is that some men may become tempted and indulge in promiscuity, which is detrimental to the couple's relationship and marriage Shirindi & Makofane (2015).

Infertility: This may cause anxiety, distress and frustration in marriage and subsequently lead to divorce. Having children is the most common reason why people get married Benokraitis (2007). Arugu (2014) says, "In African culture, any marriage that is not blessed with children is not considered to have achieved its aim"³. Childlessness is not acceptable in many societies that place a high value on children. It is assumed that when a couple cannot bear children, there will be nobody to remember them. Their genealogical line will disappear. Moreover, in some cultures a woman who gives birth to girls only Mohanty & Biswal (2007); Thabede

(2017) may be divorced, because the girl child cannot continue with the surname of the father.

Abuse: This is one of the major contributors to the dissolution of marriage Preller (2014). It occurs in all age groups, ethnic groups and class groups, and comes in a variety of forms, from physical abuse (domestic violence) to verbal, emotional, psychological and even financial abuse. The most painful issue is that children learn what they see. By merely being a witness to abuse between their parents, they might at a later stage become victims in abusive relationships themselves.

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

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.

Constant Arguing: It's "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, and criticizing, nagging and comparing spouse with another person

Unrealistic Expectation: This is 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.

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.

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. Journal (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”.

Desertion: This is also known as abandonment; 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.

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.

Not consummating a marriage: The refusal of spouses to engage in sexual relations with the husband or wife may be a causer 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 established that the one of the spouses have an

incurable condition that causes impotency and therefore they were unable to consummate the marriage.

Covenant Has Been Replaced by Contract Thinking: According to J. P. Lichtenberger (1931) people enter marriage for personal happiness, not covenant commitment. When happiness fades, the contract feels void. God designed marriage as a lifelong covenant before Him. What God has joined together, let no one separate. A covenant says “I will” even when I don’t feel like it. A contract says “I will as long as it benefits me.”

Self-fulfillment and “find yourself” culture tell people it’s okay to exit when they feel unfulfilled. But Hebrews 13:4 calls marriage honorable and the bed undefiled because it’s binding.

Sexual Immorality and Pornography: Adultery, emotional affairs, and porn use have exploded with internet access.

Jesus said, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” [Matt 19:9]. Sexual immorality breaks the “one flesh” union [Gen 2:24; 1 Cor 6:16].

Porn is called “harmless” but it creates a fantasy bond that kills real intimacy. Ephesians 5:3 says there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality among believers. Secret sin destroys trust long before it becomes public.

Unforgiveness, Bitterness, and Hard Hearts: Couples stop talking, keep score, and refuse to forgive. Small offenses become walls.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. Jesus tied forgiveness to being forgiven. A hard heart was the reason Moses allowed divorce.

Conflict is avoided or fought online, not resolved. People prefer to vent to friends or social media than reconcile with their spouse.

Unequal Yoking and Poor Premarital Foundations: Believers marry unbelievers, or marry quickly without shared values, financial habits, or conflict skills.

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers”. Two people pulling in opposite spiritual directions will eventually tear apart. Also, Luke 14:28 says to count the cost before building. Dating culture rushes physical intimacy and delays spiritual conversations. Many enter marriage without ever doing premarital counseling or discussing core issues.

Neglect, and Failure to Love Sacrificially: Emerson Eggerichs (2004) totally agrees with Husbands not leading lovingly, wives not respecting. Husbands are commanded to love wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”. Wives are to respect husbands. 1 Peter 3:7 warns husbands that dishonoring wives hinders prayer. The church sometimes confuses submission with silence. Scripture

never calls abuse acceptable. “Hate divorce,” says the Lord, but He also hates violence

Idolatry of Career and Children: Work, money, ministry, or kids become more important than the spouse. “No one can serve two masters” [Matt 6:24]. When anything takes God’s place, it takes the spouse’s place too. Colossians 3:5 calls greed idolatry. Hustle culture and “mom guilt” create schedules where spouses are roommates, not one flesh. Proverbs 5:18 says, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth.” Joy requires time and attention.

Cultural Normalization and Lack of Accountability: Divorce is seen as normal, even among believers. The fear of God and fear of church discipline is gone.

1 Corinthians 5 shows the church must address unrepentant sin to protect the body. Hebrews 10:24-25 calls us to spur one another on and not neglect meeting together. Individualism says “my marriage is private.” But Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says two are better—we need community to hold us up when we fall. Without accountability, small cracks become breakups.

Today, family interaction is affected by social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp. People are free to post or share any sensitive comments without thinking about the influence the shared information may have in a relationship or marriage. Many hours are spent on social media, leading to disconnect between the couples that often cannot be repaired, and consequently divorce follows. Preller (2014).

Divorce rates amongst people are increasing more rapidly than among any of the other groups in the country Oosthuizen (2014). Economic factors such as poor or negative growth and inflationary tendencies put a strain on young couples who want more with meager resources. Money means different things to different people, so financial issues are often a reason for marital conflict and tend to lead to divorce among young couples, King (2009). Family competition and couples who live beyond their means may often lead to financial stress and subsequently divorce. For instance, a partner may wish to drive a car that the couple cannot afford, because friends or neighbors are driving such a car. Families are more likely now to accept it when a daughter gets divorced, as it has become very apparent that women are more than capable of having a successful and happy life after marriage. Modern women know their rights and are much more likely to exercise them Emery (2013). Research suggests that African men are likely to divorce a woman if they feel disrespected and when the woman earns more than they do. Scarpitti and Anderson (2011); Preller (2014); Oosthuizen (2014). Households where both spouses are employed are becoming more common among the modern-day families, which often have both spouses working, regardless of whether they have children or not. Traditionally, women remained at home while the husband brought in the money. Kanji & Schober (2013). Traditional cultural norms and expectations regard women as care givers in the family, while men are responsible for taking care of the family.

Women are regarded as inferior to their husbands. They are expected to look after the children and perform other household duties. Parsons (1949) argued that women's employment, especially in high-level jobs, was destructive to marriage by creating competition rather than enhancing solidarity between the husband and wife. The marriage-as-gendered-institution view is that spouses are more likely to separate when the man is not employed or when the woman is employed. Observations suggest that some men have an inferiority complex. Murphy (2010) about earning lower salaries than their wives.

In some marriages, mother and daughter-in-law relationships may be a challenge. Another observation by researchers is that some husbands may leave their wives because they do not get along with their mothers-in-law. The relationship problem becomes rife especially when the daughter-in-law (*ngwetsi*) stays with the in-laws. This observation is consistent with the findings of a number of researchers. Merrill, (2007); Fingerman, Gilligan, Vander Drift & Pitzer (2012). Given the causes of divorce, the family life cycle process may be disrupted. The complexity of the consequences of divorce include reorganizing the new family after divorce rather than dismantling it. For instance, it becomes necessary to establish new values, roles, rules and routines of life as the family now consists of one parent. Consequently, the changes are a source of great stress, for children and parents, making it difficult to accept and adjust to the process of change.

3.2 Effects of Divorce

Marriages that end in divorce typically begin a process of unraveling, estrangement, or emotional separation years before the actual legal divorce is obtained. During the course of the marriage, one or both of the marital partners begins to feel alienated from the other. Conflicts with each other and with the children intensify, become more frequent, and often go unresolved. Feelings of bitterness, helplessness, and anger escalate as the spouses weigh the costs and benefits of continuing the marriage versus separating. Gay C. Kitson's (1992) influential study of marital breakdown describes a distressing process characterized by emotional distance, dissatisfaction, and frequent thoughts and discussions about whether and how to separate. Many unhappy couples explore marital counseling, extramarital relationships, and trial separations, with marital happiness fluctuating upward and downward from day to day and year to year as the marital relationship and marital roles are renegotiated. These pre divorce changes in the family often negatively influence the psychological states of parents; parental stress, anxiety, and depression, in turn, inhibit effective parenting. Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth (1996) conducted a rare longitudinal study on a national sample and documented problems in parent-child relationships as early as eight to twelve years prior to parental divorce. Other studies observe that, before parental divorce, U.S. and U.K. children and adolescents suffer due to high levels of marital discord, ineffective and inconsistent parenting, diminished parental

wellbeing, and reduced parent-child affection Demo and Cox (2000); Rodgers and Pryor (1998). Taken together, these studies suggest that the alterations in family functioning that occur during a pre-divorce process lead to children witnessing their parents fighting, parents' emotional and psychological states deteriorating, and diminishing levels of parental warmth, affection, and supervision. It is important to note that these changing family dynamics contribute to children experiencing behavior problems prior to parental divorce, and that children's behavior problems, in turn, strain marital relationships, undermine parental well-being, and increase the chances of parental divorce. Acock and Demo (1994); Cherlin et al. (1991). Consequently, some researchers would argue that the negative effects of divorce on children begin well before an actual divorce occurs.

3.3 Effect of Divorce 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”¹.

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 affects children differently based on age, temperament, level of parental conflict, and post-divorce parenting quality. The research shows it's less the divorce itself and more the conflict and instability around it that drives outcomes.

1. Emotional and Psychological Effects

a. Short-term distress

In the first 1-2 years post-divorce, most children show increased anxiety, sadness, anger, and insecurity. Younger children often show clinginess, sleep problems, and regression in behavior. Teens show more anger, acting out, and questioning of relationships.

b. Long-term patterns

Meta-analyses: Children of divorce score lower on measures of psychological well-being than children from intact families, with effect sizes small to moderate.

Risk increase: Children of divorce have a 30-40% higher risk of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems compared to peers from continuously married families.

Resilience factor: 70-80% of children adjust well within 2-3 years if parental conflict is low and parenting remains consistent. The “vulnerable 20-30%” are those exposed to ongoing conflict, poor co-parenting, or multiple family transitions.

c. Internalized conflict

Children often blame themselves, especially ages 5-9. They may feel caught between parents and experience loyalty conflicts that create guilt and anxiety.

2. Academic and Cognitive Effects

a. School performance

Children of divorce average lower grades, test scores, and educational attainment. The gap emerges mostly in the 1-2 years after separation and is linked to parental stress, economic decline, and reduced parental monitoring.

b. School behavior

Higher rates of absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and dropping out are observed, especially for boys. The effect is strongest when divorce occurs in early adolescence.

c. Long-term attainment

Studies following children to adulthood find they complete 1-2 fewer years of education on average. This is partly mediated by economic decline and reduced parental involvement.

3. Behavioral and Social Effects

a. Externalizing behaviors

Boys show higher rates of aggression, defiance, and delinquency. Girls show more internalizing behaviors but also higher rates of early sexual activity.

b. Peer relationships

Some children become socially withdrawn. Others seek peer support and may associate with peers who have similar family backgrounds. Relationship with peers is often a protective factor.

c. Substance use and risk behavior

Adolescents from divorced families have higher rates of alcohol, drug use, and early sexual activity. This is linked to reduced parental supervision and emotional distress.

4. Economic and Material Effects

a. Income decline

Household income typically drops 30-50% post-divorce, especially in mother-custody households. This reduces access to extracurricular, tutoring, stable housing, and college savings.

b. Housing instability

Children are more likely to experience moves, changes in schools, and periods of poverty. Frequent moves are independently linked to behavioral problems.

c. Long-term economic mobility

Adult children of divorce earn less on average and have lower wealth accumulation. This is mediated by education and early family economic status.

5. Relationship and Attitude Effects

a. Views on marriage

Children of divorce are more skeptical about marriage and more accepting of divorce. They are more likely to cohabit before marriage and to divorce themselves – intergenerational transmission of divorce risk is about 40-50% higher.

b. Parent-child relationships

Quality depends on post-divorce parenting. Frequent contact with both parents and low conflict predicts better relationships. High conflict and parental alienation damage the parent-child bond.

c. Parenting of next generation

Adults who experienced parental divorce report lower confidence in parenting and higher anxiety about repeating family patterns.

6. Factors That Worsen or Buffer Effects

Worsen effects:

- High, ongoing parental conflict, especially conflict involving the child
- Frequent custody changes and unstable routines
- Parental alienation or badmouthing
- Multiple parental re-partnering and stepfamily transitions

- Economic hardship and housing instability

Buffer effects:

- Authoritative parenting from at least one parent
- Low conflict and cooperative co-parenting
- Stable routines and school environment
- Strong relationship with grandparents/extended family
- Counseling or school support programs
- Child's own resilience and temperament

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. The children may lose their Christian faith and practices: Following a divorce children are more likely to abandon their faith. Felgeman et al (1992). As adults those raised in stepfamilies 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.

However, divorce is a risk factor, not a destiny. Children exposed to low-conflict divorce with stable, involved parenting usually adjust well. Children exposed to high conflict, instability, and economic decline face higher risks across emotional, academic, and relational domains.

3.4 Effect of Divorce on Couple

Divorce doesn't end at the court decree. According to Emerson Eggerichs (2004) for the couple, it creates immediate and long-term changes across psychological, financial, social, and physical domains. The impact differs based on age, income, whether the divorce was initiated by one partner, and level of conflict, but some patterns are consistent.

Psychological and Emotional Effects

a. Grief and loss response.

Divorce triggers a grief process similar to bereavement. Most people experience denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventual acceptance,

often over 1-3 years. Even the partner who initiates the divorce reports elevated distress in the first 12-18 months.

b. Mental health outcomes

Depression and anxiety: Rates of clinical depression are 2-3x higher for divorced adults compared to married adults in the first 2 years post-divorce.

Stress and identity loss: Marriage is a master status. Losing it forces identity reconstruction, which is stressful even when the divorce is wanted.

Relief and growth: For couples in high-conflict marriages, divorce often leads to reduced stress and improved mental health after the initial adjustment.

Researchers call this the “crisis-and-recovery” model.

c. Gender differences

Women report higher initial emotional distress but often show better long-term adjustment. Men report lower initial distress but higher rates of loneliness, depression, and premature mortality post-divorce.

2. Financial Effects

a. Immediate income drop

Divorce splits household income and doubles fixed costs like housing. On average, women experience a 27% drop in standard of living in the year after divorce; men experience a 10-17% increase due to reduced support

obligations. This reverses over 5-10 years as women re-partner or advance careers.

b. Asset division and debt Legal fees

Dividing retirement accounts, and selling homes reduce net worth. Couples with no assets at the start of marriage are 70% more likely to divorce within 3 years, and divorce further depletes their limited assets.

c. Long-term economic mobility

Divorced individuals, especially women with children, are more likely to experience downward economic mobility. Retirement savings are significantly lower for divorced adults over 50 compared to continuously married peers.

3. Physical Health Effects

a. Health decline during transition

The stress of divorce is linked to increased risk of heart disease, hypertension, and weakened immune function in the 2-4 years following separation. Mortality risk is 23% higher for divorced men and 16% higher for divorced women compared to married peers.

b. Health behaviors

Divorce correlates with increased alcohol use, smoking, poor diet, and reduced exercise during the adjustment period. For some, it also leads to better health if they exit an abusive or high-stress marriage.

4. Social and Relational Effects

a. Social network disruption

Divorce often means losing mutual friends, in-laws, and community ties, especially if the couple was embedded in a church or cultural community. This increases isolation and reduces social support.

b. Re-partnering patterns

About 55% of divorced adults remarry. Remarriages have a higher divorce rate than first marriages - around 60-67% - partly due to unresolved issues from the first marriage and stepfamily complexity.

c. Trust and future relationship attitudes

Many divorced adults develop more cautious attitudes toward commitment. Those from high-conflict divorces often report lower trust and higher fear of intimacy in subsequent relationships.

5. Effects Specific to Christian Couples

In church contexts, additional effects appear:

Spiritual crisis: Divorce can cause questioning of faith, guilt, and feelings of failure, especially in denominations with strong anti-divorce teaching.

Church involvement: Jay E. Adams (1980) stated that some report reduced church attendance due to stigma or scheduling conflicts with single-parent responsibilities. Others report increased reliance on faith communities for support.

Leadership restrictions: In many churches, divorced individuals face restrictions on serving in leadership, which affects identity and community role.

6. Key Moderating Factors

The severity of effects depends on:

- 1. Conflict level:** High-conflict divorces produce worse outcomes than low-conflict or amicable ones.
- 2. Voluntariness:** Partners who felt the divorce was forced on them have worse adjustment than those who chose it.
- 3. Social support:** Strong family, church, or friend networks buffer negative effects.
- 4. Time:** Most negative effects peak in year 1-2 and decline by year 4-5, though financial effects can persist longer.

However, for most couples, divorce is a major life stressor with negative effects in the short term. For couples exiting high-conflict or abusive marriages, divorce often improves mental health and well-being long term. The financial and social costs are more persistent and affect women more in the short term, men more in the long term. 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 weakens 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 are in shambles. Bryant (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. Wallensten and Blakeslee (2004).

According to Furstenberg et al (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.

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 surrounding her.

3.5 Effect of Divorce on Family Relationship

Divorce doesn't just end a marriage. It reorganizes the entire family system and changes the quality and structure of relationships between spouses, parents and children, siblings, and extended family. The impact depends on conflict level, custody arrangements, and how well the family manages the transition.

1. Spousal Relationship: From Marriage to Co-Parenting or Adversaries

a. Post-divorce dynamics

The marital relationship ends legally, but the relationship often continues as co-parents, financial partners, or adversaries.

Low-conflict divorce: Couples shift to cooperative co-parenting. Communication focuses on children, schedules, and finances.

High-conflict divorce: Relationships remain hostile. Ongoing litigation, disputes over money, and badmouthing keep the family system in crisis mode for years.

b. Trust and emotional bond

Michele Weiner-Davis (1992) states that trust is usually broken, and emotional intimacy ends. Some couples report relief and improved civility after separation. Others remain emotionally entangled through anger or unresolved grief.

c. Re-partnering effects

Introducing new partners creates stepfamily dynamics. This can improve the parent's well-being but often adds strain between ex-spouses and between children and stepparents.

2. Parent-Child Relationships

a. Contact and involvement

Custody arrangements determine frequency of contact. Non-resident parents, usually fathers, see a sharp drop in contact in the first 2 years. By 5 years post-divorce, 20-25% of non-resident parents have no contact with their children.

b. Relationship quality

Quality depends more on parenting behavior than on residence.

Positive: Consistent involvement, low conflict, authoritative parenting preserves closeness.

Negative: High conflict, parental alienation, or using children as messengers damages the bond. Children often feel caught between parents.

c. Role reversal and prettification

Older children sometimes take on adult roles emotional support for a parent, childcare, managing household tasks. This can increase maturity but also stress and resentment.

3. Sibling Relationships

a. Increased closeness

Siblings often become closer after divorce as they rely on each other for emotional support. This is especially true in adolescence.

b. Increased conflict

Stress and resource competition can increase sibling rivalry. Children may take sides with different parents, creating rifts between siblings.

c. Long-term effects

Adult siblings from divorced families report both stronger bonds and more estrangement than those from intact families. The difference hinges on how parents managed conflict.

4. Extended Family Relationships

a. Grandparents and in-laws

Contact with paternal grandparents often declines after divorce, especially if the father loses contact. Maternal grandparents usually maintain or increase contact. Legal disputes over visitation rights have become more common as grandparents seek access.

b. Extended kin networks

Divorce shrinks the network of aunts, uncles, and cousins on the non-resident parent's side. This reduces social support and cultural continuity for children.

c. Stigma and inclusion

In religious or tight-knit communities, divorced families can experience stigma or exclusion, which strains relationships with extended family and church members.

5. Family System Changes

a. Boundary disruption

Divorce blurs generational boundaries. Children may be drawn into adult conflicts or given adult responsibilities. Parents may lean on children for emotional support, reversing parent-child roles.

b. Triangulation and loyalty conflicts

Children are often placed in the middle, forced to choose sides. This creates anxiety and damages relationships with both parents

c. Restructuring of family roles

Single parents take on dual roles. Household labor, discipline, and decision-making shift. This can empower single parents but also lead to role overload and stress.

d. Intergenerational effects

According to Willard F. Harley Jr. (1986) adult children of divorce have more distant relationships with parents on average. They are also more likely to have strained relationships with siblings if childhood conflict was high.

e. Stepfamily integration

Successful stepfamilies develop new rituals and roles over 4-7 years. Poor integration leads to ongoing tension between biological parents, stepparents, and children.

6. Key Moderators

1. **Conflict level:** Ongoing conflict is the strongest predictor of poor family relationships post-divorce.
2. **Parenting quality:** Warm, consistent parenting from at least one parent buffers most negative effects.
3. **Time since divorce:** Relationships stabilize after 2-4 years for most families. High-conflict families remain unstable longer.
4. **Economic stability:** Financial strain increases stress and conflict across all relationships.

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 child”. Amato (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”⁸. Wallerstein 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 considerable opportunity to influence their children's attitude and behavior.

Grandparent-grandchild relationship: divorce negatively affects grandparents'/grandchild relationship. “Paternal grandparents frequently cease

to see their grandchildren as their grandchildren's contact with their own father diminishes. 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

3.6 Effects of Divorce on Society and the World at Large

Malachi 2:15 "Guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth". Divorce is not just a private family matter. "If one member suffers, all suffer together." When covenant breaks in homes, it ripples into nations.

I. SOCIAL EFFECTS: The Community Level

1. Rise in Child and Youth Vulnerability

Effect: Children of divorce are statistically more at risk for academic dropout, teen pregnancy, drug use, and early sexual activity. Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child...”

Why: Family instability equal less supervision, divided resources, emotional trauma. Psalm 127:3 “Children are a heritage...” but fatherlessness weakens that heritage.

World Data: UNICEF notes children in single-parent homes face higher poverty risk globally.

2. Increased Poverty and Economic Strain

Effect: Divorce is a leading cause of women and children falling into poverty. Households split into two equal doubled rent, school fees, and legal costs.

Why: 1 Timothy 5:8 “Provide for relatives.” When the structure breaks, provision breaks. States then carry the cost via welfare, housing, and courts.

World Impact: Higher demand on social services, food banks, and NGOs.

3. Weakening of Community and Social Capital

Effect: Jay E. Adams (1980) states that divorce reduces church attendance, neighborhood stability, and volunteerism. People in crisis withdraw.

Why: Psalm 133:1 “How good it is when brothers dwell in unity.” Broken homes often mean broken community ties.

Result: Fewer mentor fathers, fewer stable small groups, more isolation more crime, depression.

4. Normalization of Broken Covenant Culture

Effect: Gary Chapman (1992) “Trial marriage,” cohabitation, serial relationships rise when divorce is normalized. Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor.”

Why: Culture learns from what it sees. Romans 1:32 “They not only do them but give approval.”

World Impact: Legal systems shift to “no-fault, quick-exit” models, making lifelong commitment rarer.

II. GLOBAL / WORLDWIDE EFFECTS

5. Impact on National Demographics & Birth Rates

Effect: Divorced or delayed-marriage populations contribute to declining birth rates in many nations.

Why: Genesis 1:28 “Be fruitful and multiply.” Broken or unstable marriages delay/avoid childbearing.

World Impact: Aging populations, labor shortages, pressure on pension systems seen in Europe, East Asia, and North America.

6. Mental Health & Public Health Burden

Effect: Divorce is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse in adults and children.

Why: Proverbs 18:14 “A crushed spirit who can bear?” Grief and stigma and conflict create health costs.

World Impact: WHO-level increase in demand for mental health services, insurance claims, hospital care.

7. Intergenerational Cycles of Instability

Effect: William J. Doherty (2023), Children of divorce are statistically more likely to divorce themselves. Generational patterns in individual responsibility.

Why: They often lack a model for conflict resolution, forgiveness [Col 3:13], or covenant.

World Impact: Perpetual cycle that weakens institutions across generations.

8. Strain on Legal, Educational & Church Systems

Effect: Courts get clogged with custody, child support, and domestic violence cases.

Schools manage more trauma. Churches manage more pastoral crises.

Why: Matthew 19:8 “Because of your hardness of heart...”

World Impact: Taxpayer money, church resources, and school counselor time are diverted from other development work.

III. SPIRITUAL & MISSIONAL EFFECTS

9. Weakened Gospel Witness to the World

Effect: John 17:21 “That they may all be one... so that the world may believe.” Gary Chapman (1992) states when Christian marriages fail at the same rate as the worlds, evangelism loses credibility.

Why: Unbelievers ask: “If your God can’t hold your home, why trust Him with your soul?”

10. Redefinition of Family in Law & Policy

Effect: Nations rewrite marriage, custody, and education laws to fit high-divorce realities.

Why: Policy follows culture. Isaiah 5:20 “Woe to those who call evil good...”

World Impact: Curriculum changes, gender/parenting debates, religious liberty tensions in schools and workplaces.

Effect on Society

Fatherlessness / Child risk God as Father to the fatherless Psalm 68:5

Poverty & strain Diligence and provision and community care Prov 21:5; Acts 2:44-45. Covenant devaluation Teach marriage as sacred covenant Mal 2:14; Eph 5:31-32’ health crisis Healing for the brokenhearted Ps 147:3; Isa 61:1

Weak gospel witness Homes as light to the world Matt 5:14-16

Key Truth to Hold:

1. Grace without compromise: John 8:11 “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” The Church must care for the divorced without calling divorce “God’s plan A.”

2. Prevention is mission: Proverbs 24:3 “By wisdom a house is built.” Strong homes build strong nations. Deuteronomy 6:7 “Teach them diligently to your children.”

In conclusion, Joshua 24:15 “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Societies are built house by house.

3.7 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.

Paul’s teaching on divorce appears primarily in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 and implicitly in Ephesians 5:22-33 and Romans 7:1-3. He builds on Jesus’ teaching but addresses situations Jesus did not cover, especially mixed marriages in the Gentile church.

1. Paul and Jesus: Continuity and Extension

Jesus addressed divorce in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9, permitting it only for porneia “sexual immorality.” Paul does not contradict Jesus but applies the principle to new cases: 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 “To the married I give this command, not I but the Lord: A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”

Key points from scholars:

Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT: Paul distinguishes “the Lord’s command” from his own inspired apostolic instruction. V.10-11 reflects Jesus’ teaching on permanence and prohibition of remarriage after separation.

David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible and Church*: Paul treats separation and divorce as the same category and upholds permanence as the norm.

2. The Pauline Privilege:

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 Paul addresses “the rest” – believers married to unbelievers a situation Jesus did not address. 1 Corinthians 7:15 “But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.”

Interpretation:**Abandonment as grounds:**

If an unbelieving spouse departs, the believing spouse is “not bound.” Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC: “Not bound” likely means not bound to the marriage, allowing remarriage. Craig Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, and Cambridge: The term implies release from marital obligation.

Peace as the goal:

Paul’s concern is pastoral. He does not encourage divorce but recognizes that forced cohabitation with a hostile unbeliever may destroy peace and witness.

No command to separate:

Michele Harwood (1993) say the believer should not initiate divorce. The marriage is sanctified by the believing spouse’s presence. Theological term: This is called the “Pauline privilege,” distinguished from the “Matthean exception” of porneia.

3. Marriage as Lifelong Covenant: Romans 7:1-3

Paul uses marriage law to illustrate the believer’s release from the Law: “For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.” Point: Marriage is a lifelong bond dissolved only by death. Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, and BECNT: Paul assumes the permanence of marriage as a matter of Mosaic and natural law.

4. Marriage as Analogy of Christ and Church: Ephesians 5:22-33

Paul does not discuss divorce here, but his theology undercuts it: Marriage reflects Christ's permanent, covenantal love for the church. Husbands are to love wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Andrew Lincoln, Ephesians, and WBC: The analogy makes divorce theologically incoherent. You cannot have a "divorced" Christ and church.

5. Scholarly Perspectives on the Tension

1. Traditional/Catholic view: Paul only permits separation, not remarriage, except after death. Remarriage requires an annulment. See John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio.

2. Evangelical Protestant view: Paul permits remarriage in cases of adultery and desertion. See John Murray, Divorce and Gordon Wenham & William Heth, Jesus and Divorce.

3. Egalitarian view: Paul's concessions reflect pastoral care in a Greco-Roman context where women had little recourse. See Craig Keener, And Marries Another. Paul upholds marriage as a lifelong covenant. He prohibits divorce between believers, permits separation with a call to reconciliation, and grants release in cases of desertion by an unbelieving spouse. His theology in Ephesians and Romans frames marriage as a reflection of Christ's permanent love for the church.

Remedies of Divorce

Remedies for Divorce: Prevention, Intervention, and Restoration

“Remedies” covers 3 levels: (1) preventing unnecessary divorces, (2) intervening when marriage is in crisis, and (3) restoring individuals and families after divorce.

The most effective approaches combine premarital preparation, counseling, and community support.

1. Prevention: Strengthening Marriages before Crisis

a. Premarital education and counseling

Couples who complete premarital programs have a 30% lower divorce rate in the first 5 years. Content: Communication skills, conflict resolution, financial management, realistic expectations, and role negotiation.

Format: Church-based programs like PREPARE/ENRICH, SYMBIS, or Catholic FOCCUS work well when led by trained facilitators, not just clergy.

b. Marriage enrichment programs

John M. Gottman (1993) states ongoing programs for married couples prevent drift. Examples: Retrouvaille, Marriage Encounter, Gottman’s Seven Principles workshops. Regular check-ins help couples address issues before they become entrenched.

c. Mentoring and community support

Pairing younger couples with stable, older married couples provides modeling and accountability. Churches, mosques, and community groups that create this structure see higher marital stability.

2. Intervention: Addressing Marital Crisis

a. Marital counseling and therapy

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Gottman Method Couples Therapy have the strongest evidence base. EFT shows 70-75% success in moving couples from distress to recovery.

Timing matters: Couples wait an average of 6 years after problems start before seeking help. Earlier intervention doubles success rates.

b. Mediation and conflict management

Mediation reduces hostility in separation and helps couples negotiate custody, finances, and co-parenting without adversarial litigation. It's especially effective when children are involved.

c. Addressing root causes

Effective intervention targets underlying issues:

- Financial counseling for money conflicts
- Addiction treatment for substance abuse
- Individual therapy for depression, anxiety, or trauma

- Infidelity recovery programs for affairs

d. Faith-based and pastoral counseling

For religious couples, integrating theology, forgiveness, and covenantal commitment into therapy increases motivation to stay and reconcile. Pastors trained in basic counseling reduce escalation.

3. Structural and Social Remedies

a. Policy and workplace support

For dual-career families, access to affordable childcare, paid parental leave, and flexible work reduces work-family conflict - a major divorce risk. Countries with these supports have lower divorce rates among working mothers.

b. Economic stability programs

Financial literacy training, debt counseling, and emergency assistance reduce financial stress, which accounts for 20-40% of divorces.

c. Community norms and accountability

Communities that maintain norms around commitment, provide social support, and discourage isolation reduce divorce risk. Isolation and lack of accountability are key predictors of separation.

4. Restoration and Remedies Post-Divorce

When divorce is unavoidable, the goal shifts to minimizing harm:

a. Co-parenting education

Programs like “Children in Between” teach divorced parents to reduce conflict, avoid involving children in disputes, and maintain consistent parenting. This cuts the negative effects on children by 40%.

b. Individual and group support

Divorce recovery groups, counseling, and spiritual direction help individual’s process grief, rebuild identity, and avoid repeating destructive patterns in future relationships.

c. Legal and financial restructuring

Fair division of assets, clear custody agreements, and mediation reduce prolonged conflict. Quick, low-conflict legal processes prevent prolonged trauma.

5. What Doesn’t Work Well

Crisis-only intervention: Waiting until one partner files for divorce leaves little room for repair.

Generic advice: “Try harder” or “communicate better” without skills training fails.

Ignoring abuse: In cases of domestic violence, substance abuse, or adultery, reconciliation without safety and accountability is not a remedy.

Communication

Communication between couples while involving close friends, family, marriage counselors and spiritual leaders was reported to be important in helping solve disagreements that could result in divorce. Alan Booth (1997) states that communication should entail dialogue and understanding between the partners. It provided couples with the opportunities to mend issues and learn from each other. Good communication between couples helps improve trust and strengthen relationships through better understanding. Further, the art of honesty, friendship, positive attitude, respect, love, understanding, patience and forgiveness was considered paramount in any discussion between fighting couples. Wallerstein et al (2004)

Counseling and Guidance

Counseling before marriage and in the event of misunderstanding would be a possible solution to divorce. Counseling before marriage was reported to offer preparedness and knowledge on how to handle marital issues and what to expect in the marriage life. It was necessary as it increased awareness of spouses; enhanced understanding of ways of handling each other and it indeed reduced divorce rates since it helped couples learn more about each other. Counseling and guidance was recommended from other parties including Counselors and relatives among others before getting a divorce. Jacquetet al. (2001).

Worry on Children's Welfare

Worrying about the welfare of children is a binding factor that reduces the probability of divorce. Chances of reunion between couples after a divorce were slim and mainly triggered by the presence of children according to Furstenberg (1994). Also religion and social networks played a huge role in encouraging and assisting divorce people reunite with their spouses after the divorce. It is recommended that couples should be of similar faith.

It also refers to interventions and strategies aimed at preventing divorce, restoring marriages in crisis, and reducing its negative effects when it occurs. Research and practice draw from psychology, family therapy, theology, and social work.

1. Preventive Remedies: Premarital and Marital Education

Goal: Equip couples before and early in marriage to reduce risk factors.

Key approaches:

PREP – Prevention and Relationship Education Program: Developed by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Galena Rhoades. Teaches communication, conflict management, and commitment skills. Longitudinal studies found divorce rates of 5% for PREP couples vs. 24% for controls at 3 years.

PREPARE/ENRICH: Created by David Olson. Uses assessment to target areas of risk. Studies show it improves attitudes toward marriage and reduces divorce risk.

Evidence: Meta-analyses by Carroll & Doherty 2003 found a 30% increase in marital strength after premarital education. Hawkins, Fawcett & Blanchard 2010 found moderate effects on communication.

Authors: Howard Marksman, Scott Stanley, David Olson, Jason Carroll, Alan Hawkins.

2. Therapeutic Remedies: Marriage Counseling and Therapy

Goal: Repair relationships in crisis through structured intervention. Approaches: Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT): Developed by Sue Johnson. Focuses on attachment and emotional bonding. Meta-analyses show 70-75% of couples move from distressed to non-distressed.

Gottman Method: John and Julie Gottman's research identified "Four Horsemen" of divorce and interventions to reverse them. Their "Sound Relationship House" model is widely used.

Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT): Focuses on changing maladaptive thoughts and behaviors.

3. Mediation and Conciliation Remedies

Goal: Resolve disputes outside court to reduce conflict and preserve co-parenting.

Process: A neutral mediator helps couples negotiate property, custody, and support.

Benefits:

Cost 25-40% of litigated divorce

Faster: 4-8 weeks vs. months/years

Reduces conflict and preserves relationships, especially important with children

Authors: Forrest S. Moisten, Collaborative Divorce Handbook; Robert A. Baruch Bush &

Joseph P. Folger, the Promise of Mediation.

4. Church-Based and Community Remedies

Goal: Use faith communities and peer support to sustain marriages.

Roles: Church leadership: Provide theological framing, premarital counseling, and accountability. Tim Keller's The Meaning of Marriage is widely used in churches.

Lay counselors: Trained couples deliver PREPARE/ENRICH and mentoring.

Olson's model is designed for lay administration.

Support groups: Programs like Retrouvaille, Marriage Enrichment, and Divorce Care provide peer accountability and skill practice. Carroll & Doherty found ongoing contact and accountability improve outcomes.

Authors: Tim Keller. The Meaning of Marriage; David Olson, PREPARE/ENRICH; Robert Stahmann, Premarital and Premarital Counseling.

5. Legal and Policy Remedies

Goal: Reduce divorce through law and social policy.

Waiting periods and mandatory mediation: Some states require mediation before divorce proceedings.

Covenant marriage laws: Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas offer optional covenant marriage with stricter divorce requirements.

Economic support: Policies addressing financial stress reduce a major predictor of divorce.

Authors: Linda Waite & Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*; David Popenoe & Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions* reports.

6. Post-Divorce Remedies

When divorce occurs, remedies focus on minimizing harm:

Co-parenting education: Programs like Children Cope with Divorce reduce child maladjustment.

Therapy for individuals: Addresses grief, anger, and adjustment.

Grave-dressing phase: Steve Duck's model shows that how individuals make sense of the breakup affects future relationships. Remedies for divorce work best as a tiered system. Prevention through premarital education reduces risk. Therapy and mediation address crises. Church and community support sustain gains. Post-divorce interventions reduce harm to individuals and children. Want me to expand this into a section with Chicago style footnotes and a bibliography for academic use?

3.8 Steve Duck's Theory of Divorce

Duck (1998) suggests that the dissolution of relationships is an extended process composed of several different parts, which might be either sequential or

compounded. In this approach the breakup of a relationship is not simply an event that occurs and to which two partners react. Rather it is a long-term psychological process involving internal reflection, discussion with a partner, consultation with social networks, and the creation of personally satisfying stories about the history of the relationship from beginning to end.

The first *Intrapsychic Phase* of this process involves an individual brooding on the fact that the relationship is not satisfactory in some way from his or her perspective. This is followed by The *Dyadic Phase* when the couple is confronted with the dissatisfaction experienced by one or both partners such that the dyad needs to discuss and evaluate it. The next phase, a *Social Phase*, involves the social networks in which the dyad is necessarily embedded—all those other people whose lives intertwine with the couple or one of its members. Last comes the *Grave-Dressing Phase*. An important and under-recognized feature of the breakup of relationships is the need for people to publish a record of the relationship and its death. For various reasons, both psychological and social, people "need" to justify themselves to other people and, in particular, to offer an account of the breakup that shows them in a favorable light relative to relational standards in the society. Such stories typically suggest that the breakup was inevitable and necessary for the person to bring about, or else maturely and mutually agreed, or else that the speaker was somehow duped or betrayed by the other person.

3.9 Miller and Parks' Aftermath Theory of Divorce

Miller and Parks (1982) examined relationships of couples after divorce or breakup; they have most often examined the relationships of noncustodial parents with their children, although there is also work on the consequences of broken dating relationships. Most research suggests that relationships between ex-spouses have typically been acrimonious or difficult but the existence of children gives them little choice about meeting. If they take their roles as parents seriously then they will need to continue to interact in order to consider and discuss the future of the children or to see one another at social or educational events involving the children. Recent research has shown a more complicated picture with several examples of good relationships between ex-partners, some of whom report closer friendships after divorce than when they were married. Many people stay friends after the end of their romance and discover that one of the most difficult tasks is to work out a plausible account of their current friendship to tell other people. They must find a way in which to handle people's typical suspicion that the friendship is really a disguised sexual relationship. Such recent evidence strongly suggests that the process of relationship dissolution is not simply an emotional decision but a long-term process with consequences for accounting to other people.

CHAPTER FOUR

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

God-ordained marriage is a monogamous, permanent, and exclusive union. This is alarming. While the remedy to this is complex and includes understanding what the Bible teaches about marriage, knowing what the Bible teaches about divorce can also help.

4.1 Marriage and Divorce in the Bible

According to Gary Chapman (1992) marriage is a sacred union. God's design is lifelong commitment. Divorce allowed in specific cases. Emphasis on forgiveness, reconciliation, and love.

According to Emily (2011), marriage was ordained by God as an intimate and complementing union between a man and a woman in which the two become one physically, in the whole of life, in its purpose to reflect the relationship of the Godhead, and to serve God. With the fall of humankind the divine purpose and function of marriage were damaged by sin, and the marriage relationship often destroyed.

Kim (2013) emphasizes that the contemporary Christian views on divorce find their basis both in biblical sources dating to the giving of the law to Moses and political developments in the Christian world long after standardization of the Bible. According to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus emphasized the permanence of marriage,

but also its integrity. In the book of Matthew Jesus says "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".

Both in the Gospel of Matthew and of Mark, Jesus remembers and quotes Genesis 1:27 ("male and female created He them"), and Genesis 2:24 ("shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh"). Paul the Apostle concurred but added an exception, known as the Pauline privilege, (Miller and Parks, 1982).

1. The Biblical Design for Marriage

According to Mark Fine (2010) The Bible presents marriage as a covenant instituted by God at creation. Genesis 2:24 states: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This establishes three elements: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. Scholars note this is a public, exclusive, lifelong union designed for companionship, procreation, and mutual help. Gordon Wenham in Genesis 1-15 (Word Biblical Commentary) argues that Genesis 2 presents marriage as the foundational social institution, preceding the state and church. Ephesians 5:31-32 reaffirms this and gives it theological weight and calls it a "profound mystery" referring to Christ and

the church. Marriage is thus seen as a picture of Christ's covenant relationship with His people.

2. Old Testament Teaching on Divorce

Gary Chapman (1992) states that divorce is addressed directly in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The text permits a man to give his wife a "certificate of divorce" if he finds "some indecency" in her. Scholarly debate centers on *ervat dabar*, usually translated "indecency" or "something objectionable." Conservative scholars like Daniel Block (Deuteronomy, NIVAC) argue it refers to sexual immorality. Others suggest it was broader, covering any cause for displeasure. The key point is that Deuteronomy 24 regulates divorce; it does not command it. Malachi 2:16 states, "I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel," indicating God's ideal is permanence. In Ezra 9-10, Ezra requires Israelite men to divorce foreign wives who led them into idolatry. This is a unique, covenantal case tied to Israel's identity, not a general permission for divorce.

3. Jesus' Teaching in the Gospels

Jesus addresses divorce in two main passages: It was also said, 'whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery: When asked if divorce is lawful for any cause, Jesus appeals to Genesis 1-2 and says, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man

separate.” He acknowledges Moses permitted divorce “because of your hardness of heart,” but states, “from the beginning it was not so.” The exception clause “except for sexual immorality” [porneia] appears again.

Interpretation splits into two main views:

1. The Exception View: Held by D.A. Carson (Matthew, EBC), Craig Keener (The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary), and most evangelical scholars. Porneia permits divorce and remarriage in cases of sexual immorality.

2. The No-Remarriage View: Held by John Murray (Divorce, P & R) and others. They argue the exception allows separation but not remarriage, as remarriage would still be adultery.

Paul’s teaching in the New Testament 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 gives the most detailed apostolic instruction. V.10-11: Paul commands that a wife should not separate from her husband, and if she does, she should remain unmarried or be reconciled. V.12-16: The “Pauline privilege.” If an unbelieving spouse deserts, the believer is “not bound.” Scholars like Gordon Fee (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT) argue this means the believer is free from the marriage bond. Paul also treats marriage as indissoluble for believers in Romans 7:2-3, stating a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

4. Theological Theme Across Scripture

a. Marriage as Covenant

Malachi 2:4 calls marriage a covenant “before God.” Covenant implies oath, obligation, and permanence, not a mere contract. Meredith Kline in *Treaty of the Great King* emphasizes the covenantal structure.

b. Divorce as a Result of Sin

Jesus attributes Moses’ concession to “hardness of heart”. The Bible consistently frames divorce as a concession to human sin, not the ideal.

c. Grace and Restoration

While Scripture upholds permanence, it also shows God’s willingness to forgive and restore. The book of Hosea uses marriage and divorce imagery to show God’s covenant faithfulness despite Israel’s unfaithfulness. The early church fathers largely held a strict view. Augustine in *De Adulterinis Conjugiis* argued marriage is indissoluble except by death, and remarriage after divorce is adultery. Later, the Orthodox and Catholic traditions developed the concepts of *oikonomia* and annulment to handle pastoral cases, while Reformation churches generally adopted the exception view.

The Bible presents marriage as a lifelong covenant reflecting Christ and the church. Divorce is permitted in Scripture only in limited cases—sexual immorality and desertion by an unbeliever—but it is never presented as the

ideal. The consistent thread is that God hates the breaking of covenant but provides paths for justice, protection, and restoration.

4.2 Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament

Divorce is first mentioned in the Mosaic covenant (Lev 21:14; Deuteronomy 22:13-19 Deuteronomy 22:28-29), but it was already occurring in Israel. Under the Mosaic covenant, divorce was regulated in situations in which it might become common. It was not permitted (1) when false accusations were made about a bride's virginity; and (2) when marriage occurred because a man had forcibly violated a woman sexually. A high priest was not to marry a divorcee. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 prohibited remarriage of a woman to her first husband after the death or divorce of her second husband. These texts present legal policy whereby quick and frequent divorce is restrained and discouraged. Divorce is not commended, commanded, or approved by God in these passages, but failure to forbid divorce, especially in Deuteronomy 24, de facto means that God's law tolerated divorce to the extent that no civil or ecclesiastical penalty was imposed, (Orji, 2013).

Roderick (1991) points that the basis for divorce in (Deut. 24:1) is indecency. When the rest of the Old Testament and New Testament are examined, it appears that "indecency" probably had sexual overtones — some lewd or immoral behavior including any sexual perversion, even adultery. The imagery of spiritual adultery, resulting in God's "divorcing" Israel (Isa 50:1; Jer.3:8), is based on a real referent.

Divorce was socially permissible for adultery. Although adultery was punishable by death, it could still be included in the broad concept of indecency. It is likewise possible that Jesus employed the general term *porneia* to refer to indecency in Deuteronomy 24:1. However this phrase is understood, the text implies that this continued "indecency" was so vile that divorce was preferred by the husband. To protect the wife, however, he must provide her a certificate of divorce.

According to Morton and Bernice (1977) writes that this text also recognizes and allows, without condemnation, the remarriage of the wife. In that culture remarriage would be expected since it was difficult for a woman to survive in life unless she was married or remained single in her father's house. This does not necessarily mean that God approves of the remarriage in this text. The text prohibits remarriage to the first husband since the woman has already been defiled. Defilement is best understood contextually as the "indecency" of verse 1, not "defilement" of adultery because of marrying the second husband. Adultery would have been punishable by death of the woman and the second husband, if such had been the case. The second marriage is not condemned, nor is a third marriage forbidden. Deuteronomy 24:1-4, therefore, is a concession made by God to the fallen condition of humankind. It does not approve of or encourage divorce or remarriage, although it allows for both, except for remarriage of a woman to her first husband. These Deuteronomy texts, therefore, regulate divorce.

In Ezra 9-10 intermarriage with foreigners is viewed as a defilement of the holy race and as unfaithfulness to God (Ezra 10:2 Ezra 10:10). Shekinah proposed sending away these foreign wives and children (10:3). Ezra concurred (10:11), so the people "divorced" the foreign wives and their children. The problem centers on Israelites marrying unbelieving foreigners. The "putting away" was to be "according to the law," but no specific command of this nature can be found in the Law. Although Deuteronomy 7:1-4 commands Israelites not to make covenants or to intermarry with the people in Canaan when they enter that land, this principle is not normative since the Old Testament permits marriage to believing foreigners (Rehab, Ruth, and Christ's genealogy). The principle of not marrying unbelievers pervades the Scriptures and appears to be the major concern of Ezra. It was feared that the holy seed would be defiled, (O'Brien, 2001).

Gary Chapman (1992) states that the dissolving of the marriages is problematic. This is de facto divinely approved divorce in order to preserve the holy people. As already observed, God did not ordain divorce, and Malachi 2:14 clearly states that God hates divorce. We can only conclude that divorce is permitted in some situations. This particular situation related to Israel at that time and appears not to be normative. Malachi rebukes Israel for profaning the Mosaic covenant (Mal 2:10-16). One example is the breaking of the marriage covenant by divorcing ("breaking faith with") the wives "of their youth" (v. 14). God declares that he hates divorce!

This is the most direct statement of God's feelings about divorce. Therefore, although the Old Testament presents God's ideal for marriage as monogamous, permanent, and exclusive, the Old Testament likewise recognizes that divorce and remarriage are present because of sin and must be regulated, (Zernike, 2007). In the Old Testament divorce was permitted due to hardness of heart, Grounds for divorce included uncleanness or indecency (Deuteronomy 24:1), Procedure involved a written notice of divorce. But God's original design was for lifelong commitment. Jesus later clarified divorce rules (Matthew 5:31-32)

The Old Testament does not command divorce, but it regulates it within Israel's covenant community. The key texts are Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Malachi 2:14-16, and the divorce of foreign wives in Ezra 9-10. The OT view assumes marriage is a covenant and treats divorce as a concession to human sin.

1. The Legal Regulation: Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Text:

“If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...”

Key Issues:

1. “Something indecent” ervat dabar

The Hebrew phrase is debated. Daniel Block, Deuteronomy [NIVAC], argues it refers to sexual indecency short of adultery, likely premarital

unchastely discovered after marriage. Others, like Eugene Merrill, suggest it means any cause for displeasure. The phrase is deliberately vague and becomes the basis for the Hillel-Shammai debate in Jesus' day.

2. The Certificate of Divorce – sefer keritut

The bill of divorce was a legal document that protected the woman by confirming her free status to remarry. Gordon Wenham, Genesis 1-15, notes this shows divorce was regulated to prevent abandonment without recourse.

3. Remarriage and Restriction

If the woman remarries and that husband dies or divorces her, her first husband may not remarry her. Block argues this prevents treating marriage as a reversible contract and protects the woman from being used as a pawn. Theological Point: Deuteronomy 24 regulates divorce; it does not prescribe it. The text assumes divorce happens and seeks to limit abuse.

4. The Prophetic Condemnation:

Malachi 2:14-16 Text: "I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel."

Context: Malachi rebukes men who divorce their Israelite wives to marry foreign women.

Key Points:

Marriage is a “covenant” before God. Malachi uses the covenant language to elevate marriage beyond contract. “He hates divorce” is not absolute divorce occurs in the OT but it shows God’s ideal is permanence.

Andrew Hill, Malachi [Anchor Yale], argues the verse condemns covenant treachery, not all divorce indiscriminately. The sin is betrayal of the wife of one’s youth.

5. The Exceptional Case: Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13

After the exile, Ezra and Nehemiah require Israelite men to divorce foreign wives who have led them into idolatry.

Interpretation:

This is not a general permission for divorce. It is a covenantal act to preserve Israel’s identity and prevent idolatry.

- Gordon McConville, Ezra-Nehemiah, calls it a “corporate repentance” act, not a precedent for personal marital dissolution. [Apollo]
- The text does not address the welfare of the foreign wives, which has led scholars to debate its ethical implications.

6. Theological Themes in the OT

a. Marriage as Covenant

Malachi 2:14 calls the wife “your companion and your wife by covenant.” Covenant implies oath, obligation, and permanence. Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, shows marriage fits the ancient Near Eastern covenant pattern.

b. Divorce as a Concession to Sin

Jesus later says Moses permitted divorce “because of your hardness of heart” [Matt 19:8]. The OT text assumes sin—lust, cruelty, infidelity—that makes divorce a lesser evil than forced cohabitation.

c. Protection of the Vulnerable

The certificate, remarriage permission, and Exodus 21 protections show concern for the wife, who had little legal standing in the ancient Near East.

7. Scholarly Consensus

1. The OT never commands divorce. It is tolerated, conceded, permitted, but never commended.
2. The only explicit ground is marital failure, with “indecency” in Deut 24 being the debated term.

3. Divorce is viewed as a rupture of covenant. The ideal is permanence, as seen in Malachi and Genesis 2. As Daniel Block writes, “Divorce is a symptom of a broken world; it is never God’s design.”

In the OT, marriage is a covenant designed for permanence. Divorce is regulated in Deuteronomy 24 to prevent abuse, condemned in Malachi as covenant betrayal, and permitted in the unique case of Ezra 9-10 to preserve Israel’s covenant identity. The trajectory is clear: divorce is a concession to sin, not the ideal.

4.3 Marriage Divorce in the New Testament

According to John M. Gottman (1993) Jesus discusses the true intent of the Mosaic Law by emphasizing that righteousness issues from the heart, not from external compliance. Illustrating from the seventh commandment, Jesus argues that lust, as well as divorce, are the moral equivalents of adultery. Divorce is wrong because it produces adultery in the remarriage, except in the case of fornication. The exception clause most naturally implies that adultery is not caused by divorce when the sexual sin of fornication has already been committed by one spouse. Rather, in this event divorce is permitted because of the fornication. The great question in Matthew 5:31 is the meaning of "fornication". Porneia as Jesus called it is a broad term for many kinds of sexual impropriety. The early usages referred to prostitution, fornication, and extramarital intercourse. In later Judaism and New Testament times the word broadened to include adultery, incest, sodomy, unlawful

marriage, sexual intercourse in general, and any sexual behavior that deviates from accepted social and religious norms, (Thronton, 1985). Usage in New Testament contexts does not change these options.

According to Sharon and McKinney (1988), the argument of Matthew 5 (and Matt. 19) does not provide sufficient data to limit the usage of porneia (porneiva) in this context to one specific meaning. Porneia (porneiva) is perhaps broad in its reference to illicit sexual intercourse in keeping with the breadth of the Hebrew phrase ervatdabar (Deut 24:1). Some form of illegitimate extramarital sexual intercourse is conveyed by the term. Therefore adultery in a real sense has already transpired, and Jesus states that this is a permissible ground for divorce. Divorce, however, is not required. Some argue that porneia (porneiva) cannot mean adultery since the Old Testament penalty for adultery was death, not divorce (Lev 20:10 ; Deut 22:22-24). However, in New Testament times Jews were unable to impose the death penalty without Roman permission. Therefore, adultery severs the marriage relationship in the New Testament as did the adulterer's death in the Old Testament. Therefore, Matthew 5:31-32 is stating that divorce is equivalent to adultery since the divorced person normally remarries. However, if illegitimate extramarital sexual intercourse is practiced by one spouse, adultery has already transpired, and this breaks the oneness of the marriage relationship. Divorce, therefore, is permissible, although never required.

John M. Gottman (1993) states that in Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12 some Pharisees test Jesus by asking whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Jesus reminds them of God's original ideal for marriage in Genesis 2:24: a male and a female were created to become a permanent "one flesh" union. Humankind should not separate (divorce) what God has joined together. Unsatisfied with his answer, the Pharisees raise the issue of the divorce statement. Jesus states that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permitted divorce solely because of man's hard (sinful) heart, but this was not God's original plan for marriage (Matt 19:8). In Matthew 19:9 (Mark 10:10-12) he reiterates the principle of Matthew 5:31-32: divorce generates adultery "except" in the case of fornication where adultery has already transpired. The husband (or the wife in Mark 10:11-12) who initiates divorce for any reason other than spouse porneia, and marries another, commits adultery. Luke 16:18 looks at the situation from both directions: the one initiating divorce and the one marrying a divorced person have each committed adultery. For some reason in Mark's argument of the same event as in Matthew (and Luke's separate argument), the exception clause is omitted. The reason for this is uncertain. However, one must accept the exception clause as genuine, valid, and original in Matthew, (Wayne, 2004).

Jesus' teaching confirms and elaborates the Old Testament concepts of marriage and divorce. God's ideal for marriage is a monogamous, permanent, and exclusive

union. Because of humankind's sin divorce arose, and Moses permitted a certificate of divorce to regulate it. Divorce, however, is equivalent to adultery because it generates adultery. So the one initiating divorce and the one marrying a divorced person commit adultery. The only exception to this rule is when one of the marriage partners has committed fornication which itself is adultery. When this occurs, the other spouse may legitimately divorce the partner who has committed fornication. Such, however, is not required and should be a last alternative.

1 Corinthians 7:1-16, 39 argues that married people should stay married. First, spouses should not leave/divorce their marriage partners (v. 10). This is the ideal (v. 39). If a spouse should leave/divorce a marriage partner, he or she has only two options: (1) remain unmarried or (2) be reconciled. Remarriage is not an option. Second, a believer should not divorce an unbelieving spouse (vv. 12-13)

However, if the unbeliever leaves, the believing partner is not bound to the principle about maintaining the marriage. The marriage is thereby dissolved. Paul says nothing about the issue of remarriage, (Pamela, 1997). In the New Testament Jesus taught divorce is not God's design (Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:2-12). Divorce allowed only for sexual immorality (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). Emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation (Matthew 18:21-22, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Believers can initiate divorce if an unbeliever abandons (1 Corinthians 7:15). Paul encouraged staying in marriage, even with challenges (1 Corinthians 7:10-16)

The New Testament teaching on marriage and divorce centers on Jesus' words in the Gospels and Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians. The theme is permanence as the ideal, with limited concessions due to sin.

1. Jesus' Teaching: Permanence with an Exception

Jesus directly addresses divorce in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus states that divorce contradicts God's intention for creation. He quotes Genesis 2:24: "what God has joined together, let not man separate". In Mark, Jesus says a divorced person who remarries commits adultery. Luke adds that marrying a divorced person is also adultery.

a. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The Exception Clause

Matthew records Jesus adding an exception: divorce is permitted "except on the ground of porneia [sexual immorality]". Porneia_ refers to sexual immorality, not just adultery. Scholars like D.A. Carson and Craig Keener argue this allows divorce and remarriage in cases of sexual immorality. Others, like John Murray, argue the exception permits separation but not remarriage, maintaining that remarriage is still adultery.

b. Jesus' Theological Basis

Jesus roots his teaching in creation, not Mosaic Law. He says Moses permitted divorce "because of your hardness of heart," but "from the beginning it was not so". The purpose is to show marriage as a one-flesh,

covenant union that humans should not break. As NT scholar Craig Blomberg notes, Jesus' statements are not a comprehensive legal code but a rebuke of casual divorce and the demeaning of women.

2. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7

Paul gives the most detailed apostolic instruction.

a. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 – Command to Believers

Paul commands that a wife should not separate from her husband, and if she does, she should remain unmarried or be reconciled. He says this is “not I, but the Lord”.

b. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 – The Pauline Privilege

If an unbelieving spouse deserts a believer, the believer is “not bound”. Gordon Fee in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* argues this means the believer is free from the marriage bond and may remarry. This is seen as a second ground for divorce alongside sexual immorality.

c. Paul's View of Marriage

Paul affirms that marriage is binding “as long as he lives”. He prefers celibacy but allows marriage to avoid sexual immorality.

3. Key Theological Themes in the NT

a. Marriage as Covenant and One-Flesh Union

Marriage reflects Christ's relationship with the church. It is a covenant before God.

b. Divorce as a Rupture of Covenant

Divorce is always contrary to God's will. It is a concession to sin, not the ideal.

c. Two Grounds for Divorce in the NT Consensus

Most evangelical scholars summarize two explicit grounds:

1. Sexual immorality – Matt 5:32; 19:9
2. Desertion by an unbeliever – 1 Cor 7:15

Alexander Hodge in 1869 summarized: “the only causes upon which any civil authority can dissolve the union... are (a.) Adultery, (b.) willful, causeless, and incurable desertion”.

4. The Early Church's Interpretation

The early church was largely strict: The Shepherd of Hermas taught that fornication was the only reason for divorce, but forbade remarriage to allow reconciliation. Augustine argued marriage is indissoluble except by death. John Calvin in 1561 allowed divorce and remarriage for adultery, impotence, religious incompatibility,

and desertion. Biblical scholars generally agree that the historical Jesus prohibited divorce and remarriage, though the tradition-history is debated.

The New Testament upholds marriage as a lifelong covenant. Jesus and Paul allow divorce only in cases of sexual immorality and desertion by an unbeliever. The emphasis is on reconciliation, forgiveness, and the reality that all marital breakdown involves sin.

4.4 Effect of the fall of Man on Marriage

Locke (1993) posits that the fall of humankind (Gen 3) caused human hearts to become hard toward God and toward each other. The relational aspect of God's image, reflected in marriage, became married. Satan tempted Eve to rebel against male leadership (Genesis 3:1-6 Genesis 3:17 ; contra. Eph 5:33 ; 1 Peter 3:1). Men tended to become dominant and harsh in their leadership (Col 3:19 ; 1 Peter 3:7). Sin brought polygamy, concubine, incest, adultery, rape, prostitution, and all kinds of immorality (Lev 18 , 20 ; Rom 1:26-32) that have damaged or destroyed the marriage relationship. Marriage covenants have been violated (Mal 2:14).

Keener (1991) establishes that termination of the marriage relationship is caused by sin that entered the world after Genesis 2:21-24. Death itself, which terminates marriage (Rom 7:1-3), came by Adam's sin. Because of sin divorce arose, and Moses sought to regulate it (Deut 24:1-4 ; Matt 19:8). Divorce is not instituted or

ordained by God; rather it is generated by sin and is contrary to God's ideal for marriage, (Mal 2:14).

The entrance of sin into the world brought divorce. God hates divorce because it is contrary to his ideal. Understanding the sinfulness of humankind, he graciously tolerates divorce while establishing regulations to curb it. Jesus upheld the ideal of permanent marriage, making clear that divorce is equivalent to adultery in breaking the oneness of marriage. Initiating divorce and/or marrying a divorced person produces adultery. The only exception to this principle, and therefore, the only legitimate ground for divorce is illegitimate extramarital sexual intercourse on the part of a spouse. Divorce is permitted for this reason, but not demanded. Reconciliation should always be sought when fornication or separation has occurred. It is also permissible to dissolve a marriage if an unbelieving spouse departs/deserts the believer. Believers should, however, always love and accept divorced people and seek to encourage them in reconciliation and godly ways, (Corney, 1993). The fall of Man (Genesis 3) had a massive impact on marriage. It introduced, Sin and brokenness into relationships, Power struggles and control issues (patriarchy), Emotional distance and disconnection, Conflicting desires and expectations. God's original design (Genesis 2:24) was for unity, love, and partnership. Jesus restored marriage's original intent (Matthew 19:4-6).

The Bible presents marriage as established in Genesis 2, before sin entered the world. Genesis 3: the fall fundamentally distorts that design. The effects are theological, relational, and practical.

1. The Pre-Fall Design: Genesis 2

Before the fall, marriage was characterized by:

a. One-flesh union: “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”.

b. Nakedness without shame: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed”.

c. Mutual partnership: Woman was created as “a helper fit for him”.

Gordon Wenham, in Genesis 1-15, argues that Genesis 2 presents marriage as the foundational social institution, marked by harmony, equality, and unbroken fellowship with God.

2. Immediate Effects of the fall on the Marital Relationship: Genesis 3:7-

16. After Adam and Eve sinned, three changes directly impacted marriage:

a. Shame and Alienation

They “knew that they were naked” and made coverings. Shame replaced transparency. Sin introduced self-consciousness, hiding, and blame-shifting. Adam blamed Eve: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit”.

b. Distorted Roles and Struggle for Dominion

God's judgment in Gen 3:16 states to Eve: "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you". The Hebrew *teshuqah* "desire" implies a desire to control, not merely affection. "Rule over you" indicates a distortion of headship into domination. Bruce Waltke in *Genesis: A Commentary* notes that this is a description of the consequence, not a prescription. The fall introduced power struggles where there had been mutuality.

c. Pain and Toil Intrude into the Partnership

Childbearing becomes "in pain" and work becomes "by the sweat of your face". Marriage now functions in a world of frustration, exhaustion, and mortality. The partnership meant to reflect God's *shalom* now operates under the curse.

3. Theological Consequences for Marriage

a. Marriage as a Site of Sin's Impact

Sin broke the vertical relationship with God and immediately broke the horizontal relationship between husband and wife. As Meredith Kline argues in *Treaty of the Great King*, covenant relationships require faithfulness, and the fall introduces infidelity at both levels.

b. Hardness of Heart

Jesus later attributes Moses' permission for divorce to "hardness of heart". The fall produced a heart condition that makes covenant faithfulness difficult. The concession of divorce in Deut 24:1-4 is a legal accommodation to this reality.

c. The Introduction of Adultery and Broken Covenant

The OT uses marital unfaithfulness as a metaphor for Israel's idolatry. Hosea's marriage to Gomer illustrates that the covenant can be ruptured by sin. The New Testament calls divorce a rupture of the one-flesh union. The NT does not reverse the fall's effects by ignoring them. Instead:

1. **Diagnosis:** Jesus and Paul assume the reality of hardness of heart, sexual immorality, and desertion.
2. **Remedy:** The gospel restores what the fall broke. Ephesians 5:22-33 calls husbands and wives to model Christ and the church—self-giving love and sacrificial submission. This is a call to live against the grain of the fall.
3. **Redemption:** Paul's teaching on forgiveness, reconciliation, and the "Pauline privilege" in 1 Cor 7:15 acknowledges that some marriages are irreparably broken by sin, but the believer

is not enslaved. D.A. Carson in *The Gospel According to Matthew* notes that Jesus' teaching on divorce points back to creation and forward to the eschatological restoration, where "hardness of heart" will be gone.

4. Summary from Scholars

Gordon Wenham: The Fall introduced alienation, shame, and distorted power into marriage, turning a relationship of mutual help into one of conflict.

Bruce Waltke: Gen 3:16 describes a corruption of roles, not a divine mandate for domination.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus' teaching exposes how sin has twisted marriage, and His call is to return to creation intent while offering grace for failure.

Gordon Fee: Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 7 assume the brokenness of the world and provide pastoral paths for protection and freedom.

The fall did not destroy marriage, but it corrupted it. Shame, blame, conflict, pain, and the struggle for control entered the marital relationship. The Bible's storyline from Genesis 3 onward is about God working to redeem marriage through covenant faithfulness, forgiveness, and the ultimate restoration in Christ.

10 Biblical Reasons Why God is Not Happy with Divorce

Malachi 2:16 “For the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I hate divorce...”

Matthew 19:6 “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

God’s heart for marriage is covenant, not convenience. Ecclesiastes 4:12 “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Here are 10 biblical reasons:

1. It Violates God’s Original Design

Genesis 2:24 “Therefore a man shall leave... and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Mark 10:6-8 “From the beginning of creation... they are no longer two but one flesh.”

Why God’s not happy: Divorce tears apart what God designed to be “one.”

It reverses creation order. Matthew 19:4 “He who made them from the beginning made them male and female.”

2. It Breaks a Sacred Covenant

Malachi 2:14 “The Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth... she is your companion and your wife by covenant.” Proverbs 2:17 “...forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.”

Why God’s not happy: Marriage is a covenant before God, not just a contract with people.

Breaking it is covenant-breaking. Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor.”

3. It Misrepresents Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5:31-32 “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Why God’s not happy: Your marriage is a living picture of Jesus’ unbreakable love for His Bride. Divorce distorts that gospel picture to the world. John 17:21 “That they may all be one.”

4. It Produces Violence, Not Peace

Malachi 2:16 “I hate divorce, ‘and covers one’s garment with violence,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

Why God’s not happy: Divorce often comes with betrayal, bitterness, court battles, and wounded children. God calls it chamas equal violence, injustice. Psalm 11:5 “The wicked... his soul hates.”

5. It Hardens the Heart

Matthew 19:8 “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

Why God’s not happy: God permitted divorce as a concession to sin, not as His ideal. Ezekiel 36:26 “I will remove the heart of stone... give you a heart of flesh.” He wants soft, forgiving hearts [Eph 4:32].

6. It Opens the Door to Adultery

Matthew 19:9 “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” Mark 10:11-12

Why God’s not happy: Unbiblical divorce and remarriage creates an ongoing state of adultery. 1 Corinthians 6:18 “Flee from sexual immorality.” God guards sexual holiness.

7. It Wounds Children and Future Generations

Malachi 2:15 “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.”

Why God’s not happy: God’s purpose in marriage includes raising “godly offspring.” Divorce fractures the home where discipleship happens [Deut 6:7]. Psalm 127:3 “Children are a heritage.”

8. It Contradicts God’s Call to Forgiveness and Reconciliation

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 “A wife should not separate from her husband... or else be reconciled to her husband.” Colossians 3:13 “Forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you.”

Why God’s not happy: God is a God of restoration [Joel 2:25]. Divorce says “it’s over” when God says “forgive, bear, endure” [1 Cor 13:7].

9. It Weakens the Church’s Witness to the World

Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world... let your light shine.”

Why God's not happy: When believers divorce like the world, we lose our prophetic voice. Titus 2:5 "So that the word of God may not be reviled."

Strong marriages are apologetics.

10. It Grieves God's Heart of Faithfulness

Jeremiah 3:8, 20 God describes Israel's spiritual adultery as divorce: "She broke faith... a treacherous wife." Hosea 2:19-20 "I will betroth you to me forever."

Why God's not happy: God uses marriage language for His relationship with us. He is faithful when we are not [2 Tim 2:13]. Human divorce mirrors unfaithfulness and grieves Him.

4.5 God's Original Design for Marriage

Marriage is nearly as old as the human race. It was ordained by the Creator Himself. It was God's will that a man and a woman become one in marriage. No provision was made for either polygamy or divorce. Marriage was intended by God to be for life, Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Also study Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39. His plan, as given in the beginning, was: "one man, one wife - for life!"

It was not long, however, until men departed from God's original plan. Polygamy began to be practiced (Genesis 4:19). When the Law of Moses was given to Israel,

the people had become so hard-hearted that God permitted divorce, but only under certain conditions (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Even then, God was not pleased with divorce. He said: For I hate putting away, saith Jehovah, the God of Israel (Malachi 2:14-16).

When Jesus came into the world and gave His law for all mankind, He did not give a new and different law of marriage. Instead He called mankind back to God's original plan (Matthew 19:3-12). His commandment, what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder is still God's will for us today!

The Lord allowed only one cause for divorce. This cause is fornication on the part of one's marriage partner. Fornication on the part of a marriage partner gives the innocent partner the right to divorce and remarry. But no such privilege is given to the guilty partner! To divorce and remarry for other than the one Scriptural cause is to commit adultery. To marry one who has been divorced who was not the innocent party is to commit adultery. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committed adultery: and he that marries her when she is put away committed adultery (Matthew 19:9). Also read Matthew 5:31-32. Adulterers will not go to Heaven. They will spend eternity in Hell (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8). Those who are living in adultery must repent, stop committing adultery, and seek the Lord's forgiveness if they want to be saved.

The home is the basic unit of society. It is the function of the home to provide companionship, the satisfaction of basic human needs and the rearing and training of children. The community, the church, and the nation can only be strong when the home is strong. Many evil forces are seeking to destroy the home today. Among these evil forces are easy divorce laws, fornication, false views of woman's role in society, but most of all, ignorance of, and a failure to obey God's law of marriage which is given in the Bible.

God's people must never compromise God's will on marriage! No one has the right to change God's requirements. In a day when the world increasingly accepts divorce and remarriage for almost any cause, God's people must stand out as lights shining in darkness (Philippians 2:14-15). It is not our duty to be changed by the world's standards, but to bring the world to God's standards. Paul states in Romans 12:1-2, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God. To this end, we should strive diligently to make our homes conform to God's righteous ways recorded in His Word. It is very important that we teach our children that marriage is for life and divorce is sinful except for the one reason that Jesus gave. Let us never forget or forsake the divine admonition: Let marriage be had in

honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4). God's plan for marriage is still "one man, one wife, for life! God's original design for marriage (Genesis 2:24): One man and one woman, leave and cleave (unity and commitment), become one flesh (intimacy and partnership), reflect God's love and relationship with humanity. A beautiful, divine institution designed for love, support, and companionship

The Bible's account of marriage begins in Genesis 1–2, before sin enters the world. This "creation design" is appealed to by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–6 as normative for all time. The design includes purpose, structure, and ethics.

1. Marriage as Created by God, Not Culture

Genesis 2:18, 22-24 "The LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'... So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and... made it into a woman... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Key points from scholars:

Gordon Wenham, Genesis 1-15, and WBC: Genesis 2 presents marriage as a divine institution preceding the state and church. The "helper fit for him" [ezer kenegdo] implies strength and correspondence, not inferiority.

Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*: The narrative shows marriage as monogamous, heterosexual, and covenantal from the start. Marriage is not a human invention but a creational ordinance. Jesus confirms this in Matt 19:4-6 by appealing to Gen 1:27 and 2:24.

2. The Purpose of Marriage in Creation

a. Companionship and Complementarity

Gen 2:18: “It is not good for man to be alone.” Man and woman are distinct yet complementary. The woman is “fit for him” corresponding to him.

b. Fruitfulness

Gen 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” Procreation is part of the mandate, though not the only purpose. John Walton, *Genesis*, notes that “fruitfulness” in the ANE context includes building family and society.

c. One-Flesh Union

Gen 2:24: “They shall become one flesh.” This includes sexual union, but is broader: a comprehensive, exclusive, public union of life. Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*: The one-flesh union has covenantal structure oath, obligation, and permanence.

d. Reflection of God’s Image

Gen 1:27: “Male and female he created them.” The relationally of male and female together reflects God’s image more fully than either alone. Stanley

Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, argues that human rationality mirrors the Trinitarian life.

3. The Structure of Marriage in Creation

a. Monogamy

Gen 2:24 speaks of “a man” and “his wife,” singular. Jesus uses this in Matt. 19:5 to argue against polygamy and divorce. D.A. Carson, Matthew, and EBC: Jesus’ appeal to Gen 2 rules out polygamy as outside the original design.

b. Permanence

The phrase “hold fast” [dabaq] implies clinging with covenant loyalty. Jesus concludes, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy*, and NIVAC: Permanence is the creational ideal; divorce is a concession to sin.

c. Public and Exclusive

“Leave and cleave” indicates a new social unit, exclusive of other sexual/primary bonds. Gordon Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant: The “leave and cleave” formula is covenant language, not mere cohabitation.*

4. The Ethical State of Pre-Fall Marriage

Gen 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” This indicates transparency, trust, and absence of shame or exploitation. Bruce

Waltke: The absence of shame shows that sexuality and intimacy were uncorrupted by sin. There was no fear, manipulation, or power struggle.

5. New Testament Reaffirmation

Jesus and Paul appeal back to Genesis 2 as normative: Matthew 19:4-6: Jesus grounds permanence in creation, not Mosaic Law. Ephesians 5:31-32: Paul quotes Gen 2:24 and says it refers to Christ and the church. Marriage is a “great mystery” reflecting Christ’s covenant love. 1 Corinthians 11:8-12: Paul grounds male-female complementarity in the creation order. Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*: The NT consistently treats Genesis 2 as the theological foundation for marriage ethics. God’s original design for marriage is a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal union between one man and one woman, created for companionship, fruitfulness, and mutual help. It reflects God’s image and is meant to be characterized by transparency and permanence. Jesus and Paul treat this design as normative for the church.

CHAPTER FIVE

RATE OF DIVORCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

5.1 Divorce in the Twenty-First Century Church

Cultural, political, and legal changes in the 21st century have changed the landscapes in which our close interpersonal relationships take place. According to Duck, S. W. (1998), many choose to remain single or get married later. Online dating and cohabitation are more readily accepted and common. Our friendships, especially on social media, have gained importance. Issues surrounding gender identity, equity, and sexual orientation also loom large. Ellis B. J. (2003) added that with the help of technology, more couples, including same-sex couples, are now able to become parents. From same-sex to open and polyandrous marriages, how we define and perceive some of our most important close relationships have changed. The dissolution and reformation of partnerships and families have gained new importance as nontraditional families have become more common. The formation of families through adoption raises questions of identity and successful parenting. Relationships across cultural, racial, religious, and national lines are also more relevant in today's pluralistic societies. Finally, according to Keener, Craig. (1991). what types of relationships are considered worthy of scholarly and scientific attention, and the lenses with which to study them, have also evolved. This volume compiles the latest research and theory on close relationships of the 21st century

from multidisciplinary and international perspectives with the intent of taking stock of this shifting terrain.

The topic of divorce in the 21st-century church is multifaceted, with diverse perspectives and approaches. While some churches maintain traditional views on marriage and divorce, others have evolved to acknowledge the complexities of modern relationships.

5.2 The Rate of Divorce in the Twenty-First Century Church

Cultural and Social Shifts Affecting Christian Marriages in the 21st Century

Christian marriages in the 21st century are shaped by the same cultural forces reshaping all of Western society, but the tension is sharper because Christian marriage is understood as a covenant, not just a contract. Here's what's changed and how it shows up:

1. Secularization and the De-Socialization of Marriage

Marriage has been legally and culturally separated from its Judeo-Christian meaning. In many countries, civil law now treats marriage as a registration of intimate partnerships rather than a covenant.

Impact on Christians: The “wall between religion and the state” has broken down, devaluing core Christian teachings on the sacredness of marriage.

Canonical weddings in some countries dropped from 75% in the early 2000s to just over 22% by 2016. 1841 More Christians cohabit before marriage. 42%

of practicing Christians now say it's "wise" to live together first, up from near zero in 1970. 26e4

Source scholars link this to the "Second Demographic Transition," where ideational shifts toward individual autonomy replace normative religious authority.

2. Expressive Individualism and the Shift from "We" to "I"

The cultural ideal moved from "rugged individualism" to "expressive individualism" - the pursuit of self-actualization and personal fulfillment as the primary allegiance.

Impact on Christian marriage: Marriage is increasingly viewed as a means for personal happiness and self-fulfillment rather than a communion of persons. Pope Francis calls this a direct obstacle to the vocation of spouses. The "capstone" model replaced the "cornerstone" model: marriage is postponed until education, career, and economic security are secured, and entered only if it enhances individual goals.

This fuels the "Me-Marriage" concept where the question is "who will fulfill ME?" rather than mutual sacrifice.

Data: Between 2000-2016, the share of single people aged 25-29 rose from 50% to 59%. The average age at first marriage is now 30.2 for men and 28.6 for women.

3. Technological and Digital Disruption

Digital technologies reshape communication, community, and expectations of intimacy.

Impact on Christian marriage: “Cheap sex” via contraception, pornography, and online dating reduces emotional engagement and commitment. Technology enables a consumerist approach to relationships and spirituality, where individuals use communities to meet personal needs with little accountability. Digitalization creates competing demands on time and attention, complicating the balance between spiritual commitment, family, and professional obligations.

4. Changing Gender Roles and Family Structure

Increased female labor participation, dual-career households, and egalitarian gender norms have redefined marital roles.

Impact on Christian marriage: Traditional male headship is contested even within evangelical circles, with many arguing it’s culturally outdated. This creates friction when couples lack a shared framework for roles. The rise of hyper-feminism and egalitarianism means many women enter marriage

rejecting submission as outlined in Ephesians 5. Delayed childbearing and smaller families are now normative. 2887

5. Cultural Relativism and Redefinition of Marriage

Postmodernism rejects moral absolutes, leading to acceptance of cohabitation, same-sex marriage, and alternative family forms.

Impact on Christian marriage: Civil laws in many Christian-tradition countries now equate cohabitation with marriage, removing legal protection for the institution. Same-sex marriage is legal in multiple Western nations, and some Western churches have embraced it, creating internal division. The definition of marriage is shifting toward “any sexual or affective bond” rather than a male-female union. 1841

6. Economic Pressures and Consumerism

Materialism and consumer culture promote immediate gratification and debt-financed lifestyles.

Impact on Christian marriage: Couples feel pressure to live in a style they can’t afford, creating financial stress. Financial strain is cited as a primary cause of marital breakdown, even in Christian families. Economic insecurity leads many to delay marriage or avoid it altogether.

7. Decline in Religious Participation and Mentorship

Young adults are less likely to associate marriage rites with the church. Religious participation is declining, reducing the church's influence on marriage norms.

Impact on Christian marriage: There's an "alarming absence of discipline and mentoring" for marriage within Christian communities. Without community reinforcement, couples rely on media narratives that promote instant gratification and quick-fix solutions.

However, couples who attend church together are 15 percentage points more likely to report being "very happy" and 30-50% less likely to divorce.

8. Intermarriage and Religious Pluralism

Religious intermarriage is rising. Among Americans married since 2010, 39% are in religiously mixed marriages vs. 19% for those married before 1960.

Impact on Christian marriage: Intermarriage is linked to the growth of the religiously unaffiliated. In low-religious contexts, Christians adapt their family attitudes to resemble non-religious peers more closely.

Impact of Technology, Social Media, and Individualism on Divorce in the 21st Century. The rise in divorce since 2000 isn't caused by one thing, but 3 forces interact to weaken marital stability: technology/social media, and the cultural shift to expressive individualism.

Here's how they work:

1. Technology and Social Media: New Pathways to Conflict and Infidelity

Mechanisms:

a. Infidelity and online affairs

Social media lowers the barrier to emotional and sexual infidelity. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat are cited as starting points for affairs. A UK study by Divorce-Online found 30% of divorce cases in early 2024 mentioned social media use. 28% of social media-related divorces involved online affairs starting on platforms. 81% of divorce cases now involve evidence from social networking sites, primarily Facebook. 1 in 3 divorces now start as online affairs.

b. Jealousy, suspicion, and social comparison

Social media enables constant monitoring of partners and comparison to idealized couples online. Excessive time online is the #1 complaint in 42% of social media-related divorces. Social comparison creates dissatisfaction and a desire to end the relationship. 36% of young adults report jealousy/insecurity due to social media.

c. Reduced face-to-face interaction and “pubbing”

Time spent on phones replaces time spent with spouses. 25% of couples argue about time spent on social media daily. 42% report pubbing leads to depression in relationships. Studies show heavy social media use correlates with lower marital happiness and higher dissatisfaction.

Empirical link to divorce rates: A 10-percentage-point increase in social media use is associated with a 0.12 per 1,000 increase in divorce rates. A 20% annual increase in Facebook enrollment correlated with a 2.18% to 4.32% increase in divorce rates. In Jamaica, social media accounted for 33.96% of the total influence on divorce rates when combined with economic factors.

2. Individualism and Expressive Individualism: Redefining the Purpose of Marriage. Sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Andrew Cherlin describe the shift from “institutional marriage” to “expressive marriage.” The primary purpose becomes personal fulfillment, self-actualization, and emotional satisfaction rather than duty, children, or community.

How it drives divorce:

a. Higher expectations, lower tolerance

When marriage is expected to fulfill individual emotional needs, dissatisfaction becomes grounds for exit. Expressive individualism

“raises the bar for marital satisfaction”. People who see the primary purpose of marriage as self-fulfillment are more likely to divorce. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead notes divorce became “not only an individual right but also a psychological resource”.

b. Cultural data

Cross-national studies show divorce rates are consistently higher in individualistic societies. U.S. states higher in individualism have higher divorce rates. Individuals valuing self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism find divorce more justifiable.

c. The paradox

Cherlin argues the U.S. has high rates of marriage, divorce, and remarriage precisely because both individualism and marriage remain strong cultural ideals. People marry for love and personal growth, and leave when that isn't delivered.

3. How Technology plus Individualism Interact

The two forces amplify each other:

1. Social media normalizes exit: Platforms showcase celebrity divorces and frame separation as empowerment when relationships feel unfulfilling. This reduces stigma and makes divorce seem viable.

2. Individualism drives online behavior: The “Me-Marriage” mindset leads partners to prioritize personal time online over couple time, fueling emotional distance.

3. Digital evidence makes exit easier: Texts, DMs, and social media posts provide proof for no-fault and unilateral divorce. Technology facilitates both the breakdown and the legal process.

4. Other Contributing Factors Linked to Tech and Individualism

Online dating: 33% of marriages now start online, but couples who meet online are 3x more likely to divorce than those who meet face-to-face. Pornography and “cheap sex”: Contribute to reduced emotional engagement and higher divorce risk. Economic pressures: Online gambling and shopping via social media create financial stress that triggers divorce.

5. Counterpoint: It’s Not Deterministic. Some studies find that individualism within marriage personal autonomy paired with democratic communication can improve stability if couples maintain intimacy. The problem is expressive individualism that prioritizes self over “we.”

How Economic Pressures and Dual-Career Families Affect Divorce in the 21st Century

Economic stress and the rise of dual-career households are two of the most cited structural forces reshaping marriage in the 21st century. They affect divorce through 3 pathways: financial strain, work-family conflict, and shifting power dynamics.

1. Economic Pressures and Financial Stress: Financial problems are consistently ranked among the top 3 reasons couples divorce.

Key findings:

a. Direct link to divorce risk. 36.7% of divorcing individuals cite financial problems as a major contributor, and 55.6% of couples have at least one partner who does. Financial disagreements are stronger predictors of divorce than income level itself. When financial disagreements are controlled for, income no longer predicts divorce. Couples who argue about finances weekly are 30% more likely to divorce. Feeling that a spouse spends money foolishly increases divorce likelihood by 45% for both men and women.

b. Income level matters, but not linearly

Couples earning under \$25k have a 30% higher divorce risk than those earning over \$50k. Lower-income couples face more external stressors: housework, informal caregiving, and managing finances. Economic crises increase

divorce rates short-to-medium term. Banking crises raise divorce rates by 0.120 per 1,000 people; currency crises by 0.180.

c. The “affordability constraint” paradox

During severe recessions like 2008-2011, divorce rates dipped because couples couldn’t afford to split. This suggests financial stress pushes some couples toward divorce, but extreme poverty can trap them in unhappy marriages.

2. Dual-Career Families: Benefits and Strains

A dual-career family is one where both spouses are committed to professional work and family life. By 2024, this is the norm in most Western countries.

How they affect divorce:

a. Work-family conflict increases risk

Dual-career couples experience acute work-family spillover because no one is fully available for family needs. Role overload, time scarcity, and “second shift” labor create chronic stress. Work-family conflict is negatively associated with marital satisfaction, especially when work interferes with family. Studies show marital burnout, conflict, and psychological problems are more common among dual-career couples.

b. Gender inequality within dual-career roles matters more than employment itself

Alexandra Killewald's Harvard study found that for couples married after 1974, wives' full-time work does not increase divorce risk. What matters is division of labor: Husbands' non-full-time employment increases divorce risk. When women do most housework despite working full-time, marital strain rises. In the U.S., where policy support is minimal, a wife's employment still increases divorce risk. In Finland, Norway, and Sweden, it lowers risk due to childcare and parental leave.

c. Income pooling helps, but relative earnings create tension

Higher shared salaries increase marital stability. However, couples where the wife earns as much as or more than the husband have the highest divorce risk in some studies. This supports power-relations theories: shifts in breadwinner roles create conflict if gender norms haven't adjusted.

d. Economic independence is double-edged

Women's financial independence can empower couples and reduce reliance on one income but it also reduces the economic cost of leaving. Studies note women with more resources find it easier to divorce.

3. How Economic Pressures and Dual-Career Status Interact

a. Financial strain amplifies work-family conflict

Economic pressure forces both spouses to work, which increases role conflict.

As wives withdraw from emotional labor to earn income, marital friction rises.

b. Job insecurity is a stronger predictor than income level

Husbands' part-time employment, unemployment, and disability status are risk factors for divorce. Wives' work disability also increases risk. Job insecurity creates stress that spills into the marriage.

c. Policy context mediates the effect

In countries with generous childcare, paid leave, and flexible work policies, dual-career marriages are more stable. In the U.S., lack of support makes dual-earning more stressful.

4. The Net Effect in the 21st Century

The relationship isn't straightforward:

1. For low-income couples: Financial strain is a primary driver of divorce.

Economic stress increases conflict and reduces marital quality.

2. For middle/high-income dual-career couples: Income pooling increases stability, but time scarcity and role conflict increase risk. The net effect depends on how equitably couples divide unpaid labor and how much external support exists. e2e7

3. For women's employment: The old idea that working wives destabilize marriage is outdated. Recent studies show dual-career marriages are often more stable, with 25% lower divorce risk when the wife is a career woman

Summary: Economic pressure increases divorce primarily through financial conflict and stress. Dual-career families have higher time demands and role conflict, which can raise divorce risk, but their higher income and bargaining flexibility often make them more stable if couples manage roles equitably. The key variable is not “dual-career yes/no” but how couples negotiate time, money, and gender roles under economic pressure.

5.3 Church Perspectives on Divorce

The church doesn't speak with one voice on divorce, but all Christian traditions start from the same biblical texts and the idea that marriage is more than a civil contract. The differences are in how they weigh permanence, mercy, and pastoral reality.

1. Biblical Foundation

The church's view is shaped by 4 key passages:

- a. Genesis 2:24; Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. This establishes marriage as a covenant union intended for permanence and mutual belonging.

b. Malachi 2:16 I hate divorce says the Lord.

Used to underline that divorce is a rupture of a covenant God designed to be binding.

c. Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9 Jesus addresses divorce in the Sermon on the Mount and in response to the Pharisees. He affirms Genesis, states that divorce was permitted because of hardness of heart, and limits it to porneia -often translated as sexual immorality.

Key debate: Is this an exception clause permitting divorce and remarriage, or a description of what makes a divorce valid?

d. 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

Paul gives instructions: believers should not divorce, but if an unbelieving spouse departs, the believer is not bound. He distinguishes between what the Lord commands and what he allows pastorally.

These texts create the tension the church navigates: marriage is designed for permanence, but human sin breaks it.

2. Major Traditions and Their Positions

a. Roman Catholic Church

Doctrine: Marriage is a sacrament. Once validly contracted and consummated, it is indissoluble. What God has joined, let no man separate.

Practice: Divorce is recognized civilly, but does not dissolve the sacramental bond.

Remarriage without an annulment is considered adultery.

Remedy: Annulment - a declaration that a valid sacramental marriage never existed due to defects at the time of consent. Since Vatican II and *Amoris Laetitia*, there's greater emphasis on pastoral accompaniment and internal forum solutions for divorced and remarried Catholics, but doctrine on indissolubility remains.

Rationale: Protects the sacrament, upholds permanence, but offers canonical process for complex cases.

b. Eastern Orthodox Church

Doctrine: Marriage is a sacrament and meant to be lifelong.

Practice: Allows *oikonomia* - economy or pastoral dispensation - for divorce and remarriage up to 3 times. Divorce is permitted for adultery, abandonment, abuse, and other grave causes. Remarriage is seen as a concession to human weakness, not the ideal.

Rationale: Balances the ideal of permanence with pastoral realism. The church does not approve divorce but recognizes it as a lesser evil in some cases.

c. Mainline Protestant Churches

Doctrine: Marriage is a covenant, but not always sacramental.

Practice: Most permit divorce for adultery, desertion, and abuse, and allow remarriage. Some denominations ordain divorced and remarried clergy.

Rationale: Emphasizes grace, the falseness of human life, and the need for pastoral care over strict discipline.

d. Evangelical/Conservative Protestant Churches

Doctrine: Marriage is a covenant before God. Divorce violates God's design.

Practice: Most accept the Matthean exception & quote; for sexual immorality and the & quotes; Pauline Privilege & quote; for desertion by an unbeliever.

Abuse is increasingly accepted as grounds. Remarriage after divorce is permitted but often requires counseling and a period of restoration.

Rationale: Uphold Scripture's authority while recognizing that divorce sometimes occurs. Focus is on preventing divorce through premarital prep and counseling.

3. Common Theological Themes Across Traditions

Even with different practices, 4 themes recur:

a. Marriage as Covenant

Not just a legal contract but a sacred, lifelong commitment. This is why divorce is treated as a serious matter, not a neutral option.

b. Sin and Brokenness

Divorce is seen as a consequence of human sin - hardness of heart, selfishness, betrayal. The church acknowledges that sometimes it's the lesser of two evils compared to ongoing abuse or adultery.

c. Grace and Restoration

All traditions teach that divorce does not place a person outside God's grace. The emphasis shifts from discipline to healing, especially in the last 40 years. Divorce care ministries are now common.

d. Pastoral Responsibility

The church sees itself as having a duty to:

1. Prepare couples well before marriage
2. Intervene early in marital crisis
3. Walk with people through and after divorce without abandoning them

4. Practical Outworking in Church Life

a. Premarital Requirements

Most churches now require 6-12 weeks of premarital counseling. The goal is prevention.

b. Discipline vs. Care

Historically, some churches practiced formal discipline for divorce. Today, most have shifted to pastoral care, except in cases of unrepentant abuse or adultery.

c. Teaching on Remarriage

This is the sharpest point of division. Catholicism generally prohibits remarriage without annulment. Orthodox and most Protestants permit it under conditions. The debate centers on whether Jesus' exception clause permits remarriage.

d. Ministry to Divorced People

Almost all denominations now run divorce recovery groups, single-parent ministries, and counseling referrals. The goal is to prevent isolation and help people rebuild.

5. Where the Church Is Shifting in the 21st Century

1. More pastoral flexibility: Even conservative churches are developing clearer policies for abuse cases and moving away from & quote; stay at all costs & quote; advice.
2. Focus on prevention: Investment in premarital and marriage enrichment has grown significantly since the 1990s.

3. Integration, not exclusion: Divorced members are more likely to be included in leadership and ministry, provided there's repentance and restoration.

4. Public witness: Churches are responding to high divorce rates by speaking more on marriage health, not just marriage definition.

The church views divorce as a rupture of God's design for marriage, but not an unforgivable sin or a situation outside pastoral care. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions emphasize indissolubility with canonical or pastoral dispensations. Protestant traditions emphasize covenant permanence but allow divorce and remarriage in specific cases. Across all traditions, the trend is toward earlier intervention, more counseling, and less shaming.

1. **Traditional Views:** Some churches uphold biblical teachings on marriage and divorce, emphasizing lifelong commitment and viewing divorce as a last resort. They often cite scriptures like Matthew 5:32, 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, and Ephesians 5:22-33.
2. **Progressive Views:** Other churches take a more compassionate stance, recognizing that divorce can be a necessary step for healing and growth. They emphasize God's love and grace, focusing on supporting individuals through difficult times.

3. **Contextual Approaches:** Many churches adopt a nuanced approach, considering individual circumstances and cultural contexts.

Key Considerations

1. **Biblical Teachings:** Churches often reference scriptures to inform their stance on divorce.
2. **Pastoral Care:** Churches prioritize supporting individuals through divorce, offering counseling, community, and resources.
3. **Changing Societal Norms:** Churches grapple with balancing biblical teachings and cultural shifts.

5.4 Approaches to Divorce

Approaches cover how individuals, couples, legal systems, and communities handle Divorce from prevention to the process itself to post-divorce adjustment. The main approaches fall into 4 categories: preventive, therapeutic, legal, and communal/pastoral.

1. Preventive Approach

Focus: Stop divorce before it becomes an option.

a. Premarital preparation

Structured programs like PREPARE/ENRICH, FOCCUS, and SYMBIS teach communication, conflict resolution, financial management, and realistic

expectations. Couples who complete these have 20-30% lower divorce rates in the first 5 years.

b. Marriage enrichment

Ongoing workshops, retreats, and mentoring for married couples. The Gottman Method, Retrouvaille, and Marriage Encounter are common models. Goal is to catch drift early.

c. Cultural/religious framing

Communities that frame marriage as covenant rather than contract create stronger norms against casual divorce. This works through teaching, mentoring, and community accountability.

2. Therapeutic/Counseling Approach

Focus: Intervene when the marriage is in distress.

a. Couples therapy

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT): Targets attachment injuries. 70-75% of couples move from distress to recovery in 8-20 sessions.

Gottman Method: Uses research on conflict patterns to rebuild friendship and manage conflict.

Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy: Targets destructive thought patterns and behaviors.

b. Individual therapy

Used when one partner has depression, addiction, trauma, or personality issues that destabilize the marriage. Marriage can't improve if individual issues aren't addressed.

c. Discernment counseling

For couples where one is leaning toward divorce and the other wants to work on it. Short-term, 1-5 sessions, focused on gaining clarity and confidence in a direction.

d. Crisis intervention

Immediate safety planning and separation when there's abuse, addiction, or infidelity. The goal here is safety first, reconciliation only if safe and accountable.

3. Legal/Process Approach

Focus: How the marriage is dissolved legally.

a. Litigation

Traditional adversarial court process. Each side hires an attorney, issues go before a judge. High cost, high conflict, but necessary in high-conflict or abuse cases.

b. Mediation

A neutral mediator helps the couple negotiate custody, support, and property division. Cheaper, faster, and less damaging to co-parenting relationships. Works best when power imbalance is low.

c. Collaborative divorce

Each spouse has a lawyer, but all commit to resolving issues without going to court. Involves financial specialists and therapists if needed. Goal is settlement with less hostility.

d. No-fault divorce

Available in most countries now. Allows divorce without proving fault like adultery or abandonment. Reduced stigma but also removed a barrier that sometimes pushed couples to try reconciliation.

e. Reconciliation options

Some legal systems offer cooling-off periods, mandatory counseling, or separation before final divorce. Used to reduce impulsive divorces.

4. Pastoral/Community Approach

Focus: How religious and community institutions respond.

a. Pastoral counseling

Pastors, priests, and imams provide initial counseling, crisis intervention, and referral. Effectiveness depends on training. Good pastoral care addresses spiritual, emotional, and practical issues.

b. Church discipline and restoration

Historically involved formal exclusion for divorce. Modern approach is more restorative: accountability, counseling, and reintegration after a period of healing.

c. Support groups

Divorce care groups, single-parent ministries, and support networks reduce isolation and provide practical help. Widely used in churches and secular nonprofits.

d. Community norms

Tight-knit communities with strong norms around commitment and mutual support have lower divorce rates. Isolation and lack of accountability increase risk.

5. Post-Divorce Adjustment Approach

Focus: Minimizing harm after divorce is finalized.

a. Co-parenting education

Programs like & quote Children in Between & quote; teach divorced parents to reduce conflict and keep children out of disputes. Cuts negative effects on kids by about 40%.

b. Individual recovery

Counseling and support groups help adults process grief, rebuild identity, and avoid repeating patterns.

c. Economic restructuring

Financial counseling, job training, and legal help stabilize single-parent households.

Economic stress is the biggest driver of poor post-divorce outcomes.

There's no single approach to divorce; The right one depends on the level of conflict, presence of abuse, willingness of both partners, and available resources. The most effective systems use prevention early, therapy and mediation mid-crisis, and protective legal processes when reconciliation isn't safe or possible.

Additional ways to also approach divorce include

1. **Pre-marital counseling:** Some churches require couples to undergo counseling before marriage.

2. **Support groups:** Many churches offer support groups for divorced individuals.
3. **Re-marriage policies:** Churches vary on allowing re-marriage, with some being more permissive.
4. **Divorce ministries:** Some churches have dedicated ministries for divorced individuals.

Twenty-First Century Church

1. **Stigma reduction:** Churches strive to reduce stigma around divorce, promoting a culture of acceptance.
2. **Support systems:** Churches can provide vital support for individuals navigating divorce.
3. **Theological reflection:** Churches continually reflect on biblical teachings and cultural contexts.

Additional Approaches to Divorce

The church's approach to divorce often depends on denomination, cultural context, and leadership. Additional Approaches to Divorce in the 21st Century Church

Proverbs 15:22– “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Beyond theology and policy, the Church needs multi-layered, practical approaches.

Divorce is rarely one-issue. Ecclesiastes 4:9 “Two are better than one...”

I. PREVENTIVE APPROACHES: “Stop It Before It Starts”

1. Covenant-Education Approach

Idea: Treat marriage like a ministry you’re trained for, not just a ceremony.

Method: Pre-engagement and pre-marital and post-wedding curriculum for 2 years.

Content: Genesis 2:24 one-flesh theology, money, sex, in-laws, mental health, trauma. Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Tool: Certificate required before church wedding. Mentor-couple assigned for 24 months.

2. Emotional & Mental Health Screening Approach

Idea: Unhealed people hurt marriages. Proverbs 4:23 “Guard your heart.”

Method: Licensed Christian counselor screens both parties for attachment wounds, addiction, narcissism, depression, porn use.

Why: Many divorces trace to untreated trauma, not theology. Psalm 147:3 “He heals the brokenhearted.”

3. Digital-Boundaries Approach

Idea: Matthew 5:29 “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out.”

Method: Church-wide policy: Transparency with phones, no secret chats, no exes, accountability software. Couples’ “phone-free” Sabbath.

Why: 60%+ of infidelity cases now start online. [Barna][2022]

II. INTERVENTION APPROACHES: “When Crisis Hits”

4. Mediation & Reconciliation Approach

Idea: Matthew 18:15-17 “If your brother sins... go and tell him.”

Method: Trained, neutral elder and counselor mediate before lawyers. 90-day “Covenant Pause” with no-filing agreement.

Goal: 1 Corinthians 7:11 “Remain unmarried or else be reconciled.” Only stop if abuse or porneia is present [Matt 19:9].

5. Safety-First Pastoral Care Approach

Idea: Psalm 82:3-4 “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them.”

Method: If there is domestic violence, substance abuse, or child endangerment: Separate, protect, report. Church does not counsel couples together in abuse.

Why: Malachi 2:16 “Violence” is what God hates alongside divorce. Protecting life is biblical.

6. Deliverance & Spiritual Warfare Approach

Idea: Ephesians 6:12 “We wrestle... against spiritual forces.”

Method: Discern occult patterns, generational covenants, spirit-spouse dreams [Daniel 10:12-13]. Combine prayer and counseling. James 5:16 “Pray for one another... that you may be healed.”

Guardrail: Don’t blame demons for every conflict. Pair with therapy.

III. RESTORATIVE APPROACHES: “After Separation or Divorce”

7. Divorce-Care Ministry Approach

Idea: Isaiah 61:1 “Bind up the brokenhearted... comfort all who mourn.”

Method: 13-week support group: grief, forgiveness, co-parenting, finances, dating after divorce, parenting alone.

Tone: No shame. John 8:11 “Neither do I condemn you.” Membership, serving, communion remain open.

8. Children-First Approach

Idea: Psalm 127:3 “Children are a heritage from the Lord.”

Method: Kids’ ministry for children of divorce. Teach: “This is not your fault.” Give parents co-parenting templates that honor 1 Timothy 5:8 provision.

Why: Break the generational cycle. Exodus 20:5-6

9. Remarriage-Discernment Approach

Idea: Romans 7:2-3 and Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 held in tension.

Method: Elders’ board reviews cases biblically: grounds, repentance, healing, time. If remarriage is biblical, bless it. If not, walk in singleness with honor [1 Cor 7:7-8].

Why: Avoid both legalism and license. Galatians 6:1 “Restore... in a spirit of gentleness.”

IV. SYSTEMIC / CHURCH-CULTURE APPROACHES

10. Pulpit Normalization Approach

Idea: 2 Timothy 4:2 “Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

Method: Preach on marriage, conflict, sex, money, forgiveness yearly — not only at weddings/funerals. Invite couples to testify: “We almost divorced, but God...”

Why: Silence breeds stigma. Truth and stories reduce divorce.

11. Economic & Family-Systems Approach

Idea: Proverbs 21:5 “The plans of the diligent lead to abundance.”

Method: Financial literacy classes, debt counseling, job placement ministry.

Address in-law interference with Genesis 2:24 “Leave and cleave” training.

Why: Money plus in-laws are top 2 civil divorce causes.

12. Community Accountability Approach

Idea: Proverbs 27:17 “Iron sharpens iron.”

Method: Small “Covenant Groups” of 3-4 couples who meet monthly. Share struggles before they explode. Galatians 6:2 “Bear one another’s burdens.”

5.5 Reasons why Divorce Rate is High in the Church Today

The idea that “Christians divorce at the same rate as everyone else” is mostly a myth. Sociological data shows a split: actively practicing Christians divorce less, but nominal Christians divorce more. Here are the main reasons for the high rates seen in the church, backed by research and authors:

1. Nominal Faith and Low Church Engagement

Reason: People who identify as Christian but rarely attend church divorce at higher rates than the general population.

Evidence: Sociologist Bradley Wright found 60% of Christians who rarely attend church have been divorced, vs. 38% of regular attenders. W. Bradford Wilcox found nominal conservative Protestants are 20% more likely to divorce than secular Americans. Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program: Regular religious service attendance is linked to 50% lower divorce rates later in life.

Implication: It’s not “church attendance” that lowers divorce, but active practice and integration into a religious community.

2. Inadequate Premarital Preparation and Wrong Partner Choice

Reason: Many couples enter marriage without counseling or discernment, leading incompatibility and conflict.

Evidence: A Nigerian study on Christian divorce found “choosing the wrong marriage partner without consulting church leaders or elders” as a major cause. Scott, in *Reducing the Divorce Rate among Christians in America*, argues divorce is rising due to “little or no attention given to premarital counseling by church leaders”.

Pastoral voices note couples “rush into things and have not consulted God”.

3. Cultural and Legal Shifts Adopted by Christians

Reason: The church has absorbed broader cultural norms around marriage and divorce.

Evidence: RFPA analysis identifies 3 factors: adoption of no-fault divorce laws, more wives/mothers in the workforce, and media influence in the home. Nigerian church studies note “changes in socio-economic structure” and the influence of modern social structures on increasing divorce. Women’s liberation and changing expectations of marriage reduced tolerance for unhappy unions.

4. Specific Marital Problems Present in Christian Homes

Reason: Christians face the same marital stressors as everyone else.

Evidence: from Nigerian Christian contexts:

- Infidelity/Adultery
- Childlessness

- Financial mismanagement and alcoholism
- Quarreling and lack of harmony
- Polygamy in some cultural contexts

5. Theological Drift and Weak Teaching on Marriage

Reason: When the church weakens its teaching on marriage as covenant, divorce becomes more acceptable.

Evidence:

Theological critiques argue the church has adopted lenient views on divorce, reducing stigma and barrier to separation. Pastoral commentary notes that when couples don't "go to God" and marry for selfish reasons, they "suffer the consequences down the road".

6. Breakdown of Community Accountability and Mentoring

Reason: Reduced participation in church community means less support and accountability during marital crisis.

Evidence: Wilcox's work on the National Marriage Project links active participation in faith communities to stronger marriages. Lack of mentoring and pastoral intervention early in marital conflict is cited as a gap in many churches.

7. Individual Factors: Selfishness and Low Commitment

Reason: Personal attitudes toward marriage affect outcomes regardless of religious identity.

Evidence: Christian speakers note high divorce rates occur because “individuals love as long as it’s comfortable” and marry based on what they can get, not give. “Hardness of heart” and unwillingness to take responsibility when problems arise are cited as key issues.

8. Unrealistic Expectations: Couples often enter marriage with idealized expectations, leading to disappointment.

Unrealistic expectations can cause divorce because of the following

- Idealized Marriage: Couples often expect a perfect, fairy-tale-like marriage, which is unsustainable.
- Unmet Needs: When reality doesn't meet these high expectations, disappointment and frustration set in.
- Lack of Preparation: Couples aren't prepared for real-life challenges and conflicts.
- Blame Game: Partners blame each other for not meeting expectations, leading to resentment.
- Communication Breakdown: Unmet expectations lead to poor communication and unresolved issues.

9. Lack of Communication Skills: Poor communication can escalate conflicts.

Lack of communication skills can cause divorce because

- **Misunderstandings Escalate:** Issues aren't addressed, leading to resentment and conflict.
- **Unresolved Issues:** Problems are left unspoken, creating distance and mistrust.
- **Emotional Disconnection:** Partners feel unheard and un validated.
- **Conflict Resolution Failure:** Couples struggle to resolve conflicts constructively.
- **Assumptions and Misinterpretations:** Assumptions about a partner's thoughts/feelings lead to further conflict.

10. Financial Stress: Economic pressures strain relationships. Financial stress and economic pressures can strain relationships and cause divorce because

- **Increased Conflict:** Money disagreements lead to frequent arguments.
- **Emotional Toll:** Financial insecurity causes stress, anxiety, and tension.
- **Shift in Power Dynamics:** Financial dependence or imbalance creates resentment.

- Unmet Expectations: Financial goals or dreams aren't met, leading to disappointment.
- Lifestyle Changes: Economic pressures force lifestyle adjustments, causing friction.

11. Changing Roles and Expectations: Shifts in societal norms and gender roles create tension. Changing roles and expectations can cause divorce because:

- Shift in Power Dynamics: Changes in career, income, or responsibilities create tension.
- Unmet Expectations: Partners struggle to adjust to new roles or expectations.
- Lack of Communication: Couples fail to discuss and align on changing roles.
- Traditional vs. Modern Views: Differing views on gender roles cause conflict.
- Stress and Overload: Managing multiple roles leads to burnout.

12. Lack of Spiritual Foundation: Insufficient spiritual grounding and support can contribute to divorce because:

- No Shared Values: Couples lack a unifying spiritual bond and shared values, leading to disconnection.

- Coping Mechanisms: Partners struggle to cope with challenges without spiritual support, increasing stress.
- Different Priorities: Spiritual disconnect leads to differing life priorities and goals.
- Lack of Forgiveness: Without spiritual grounding, forgiveness and reconciliation can be harder.
- Emotional Void: Spiritual emptiness creates distance and disconnection.

13. Cultural Influences: Worldly values and secular culture impact Christian marriages.

Cultural influences can cause divorce because:

- Shifting Values: Modern cultural values (e.g., individualism) clash with traditional marriage expectations.
- Media Portrayals: Unrealistic relationship portrayals create unrealistic expectations.
- Societal Pressures: External pressures (e.g., family, social media) strain relationships.
- Changing Norms: Evolving norms around marriage, roles, and relationships create tension.
- Influence of Secular Culture: Worldly values can undermine spiritual or traditional marriage foundations.

14. Inadequate Pre-marital Preparation: Insufficient preparation for marriage challenges. Inadequate pre-marital preparation can cause divorce because:

- Unrealistic Expectations: Couples aren't prepared for reality's challenges.
- Lack of Communication Skills: Partners don't develop essential communication tools.
- Unaddressed Issues: Pre-existing issues or differences aren't resolved.
- Financial Stress: Couples aren't prepared for financial realities.
- Lifestyle Adjustments: Partners aren't prepared for post-marriage lifestyle changes.

5.6 The Danger of Divorce in the 21st Century Church

Divorce in the church today is not just a private family matter. Research and pastoral observers note that it creates ripple effects across individuals, families, and congregational life. The danger is both spiritual and social.

1. Spiritual and Relational Rupture

Divorce severs the covenant that Scripture uses to picture Christ and the Church. Tim Keller argues in *The Meaning of Marriage* that marriage reflects the gospel. When it breaks, the visible sign of that gospel is damaged. The danger is that the church loses a primary apologetic for God's faithful love.

Catholic teaching calls divorce “an evil” that introduces disorder into the family and society, bringing grave harm to the deserted spouse and children. Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* 246 states that “our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times”.

2. Congregational Disruption

Life Way Research found that divorce in a congregation has measurable institutional costs:

- 31% of pastors said divorce fractured other relationships in the church
- 16% said it created leadership voids
- 11% said it hurt the church’s reputation
- 10% said it stopped or slowed church momentum
- 73% of pastors said at least one spouse stopped attending after divorce

Ed Stetzer notes that divorce often leads to people leaving the church they attended before separation. When leaders divorce, the effect is magnified: “The events of the clergy or church pastoral family divorce are major causes of deep trauma and suffering”.

3. Impact on Children and Next Generation

The danger extends to the next generation. Among children who attended church before parental separation, 35% stopped attending. A Liberty

University dissertation notes that divorce affects children “from a spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional perspective”. A study in Stratford Journal concluded that divorce among church members has “staggering or extreme consequences on its infrastructural development,” because stable families form the backbone of the church.

4. Pastoral Care Gaps and Missteps

The 21st century church faces a danger not just from divorce itself, but from how it is handled. Life Way/Life Saving Divorce survey found that only 25% of divorced families reported receiving clergy help or congregational outreach during or after divorce.

Pastoral care risks:

- 20% of divorcing church members said leaders were judgmental
- 17% felt like a burden
- 41% said they would not trust church leadership for guidance due to lack of empathy or useful advice. As one UK pastoral blog notes, inexperience can lead to “advice which is unwise, inappropriate, and in some cases damaging,” especially in abuse situations where investigation becomes about “who you believe”.

5. Theological Drift and Cultural Accommodation

David Instone-Brewer, in *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, argues that the Bible permits divorce for adultery, abandonment, neglect, and abuse. Critics argue that expanding grounds can lead to a “free-for-all” if not handled carefully.

The danger in the 21st century is that cultural permissiveness bleeds into the church. Pew and Barna data show that about a third of evangelicals now think divorce should be easier. When the church mirrors culture, it loses its distinct witness on covenant faithfulness.

6. Statistical Reality in the Church

The danger is often overstated or understated: Regular attenders divorce at rates 25-50% lower than non-attenders. Harvard’s 14-year study found frequent attendance associated with 50% lower divorce risk. Nominal Christians who rarely attend have higher divorce rates than the general population. Bradley Wright found 60% of Christians who rarely attend have been divorced. 40% of pastors say at least one couple in their church separated or divorced in the past year. The danger is not that the church is worse than the world, but that “saying you believe something or merely belonging to a church, unsurprisingly, does little for marriage”. Without active discipleship, the church’s divorce rate approaches the cultures.

7. Pastoral Response Emphasized by Author

The consensus across sources is not that divorce should be ignored, but that prevention and care are urgent:

Strengthen marriages before crisis: W. Bradford Wilcox finds “active conservative. Protestants” who attend regularly are 35% less likely to divorce.

Provide qualified pastoral care: Avoid giving advice in abuse cases without professional help. Avoid shame and exclusion: Many divorced people feel they wear a “Scarlet D” and leave the faith. Pope Francis calls for healing wounds, not increasing them.

Teach clear biblical grounds: Instone-Brewer argues the church must rediscover that divorce should occur only when marriage vows are broken, not for “any cause”. The danger of divorce in the 21st century church is that it wounds individuals, scatters families, fractures congregations, and erodes the church’s witness to covenant faithfulness. The data show active faith practice reduces risk, but nominal affiliation does not. The pastoral challenge is to be both biblically clear and compassionately present.

How People See Divorce in the 21st Century Church

Attitudes toward divorce in the church today are not uniform. They vary by denomination, level of religious practice, age, and cultural context.

Researchers and pastors describe a tension between historic doctrine and lived experience.

1. The “Serious Believer” vs. “Nominal” Divide

Sociologists find the biggest predictor of attitude is not just label “Christian,” but practice. W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, reports that “active conservative Protestants” who attend church regularly are 35% less likely to divorce than the unaffiliated. But “nominally attending conservative Protestants are 20% more likely to divorce, compared to secular Americans”. Bradley Wright, sociologist at UConn, explains: 60% of Christians who rarely attend have been divorced, compared to 38% of regular attenders.

How people see it:

Practicing believers tend to view divorce as a last resort that violates covenant, but still possible in cases of adultery, abandonment, abuse. Nominal or cultural Christians often mirror secular views, seeing divorce as a private decision with few religious implications.

2. Pastors Report a Pragmatic, Pastoral View on the Ground

LifeWay Research surveyed Protestant pastors in 2017 about divorce in their congregations.

Findings on perception:

40% of pastors said at least one couple in their church separated or divorced in the past year. 70% of divorcing couples were attending weekly before separation.

Pastors describe divorce as causing fractured relationships, leadership voids, and reputation damage.

Ed Stetzer, then with LifeWay, noted: “Divorce is a widespread issue for Protestant churches” and many divorcing members felt unsupported or judged by their church.

How people see it: Pastors see divorce as common and painful, but many feel ill-equipped to address it. Congregants often hide marital trouble until it’s too late.

3. Catholic Perspective: Evil, But Requiring Mercy

The Catholic Church maintains that divorce is “an evil” that “introduces disorder into the family and into society”. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia* 246, writes that the pastoral task is “to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times”. Catholicpreaching.com notes that many divorced Catholics feel they wear a “Scarlet D” and fear alienation from God and the Church.

How people see it: Official teaching sees divorce as contrary to God's plan, but pastoral emphasis since 2016 has shifted toward accompaniment, discernment, and reducing shame. 20.7% of U.S. Catholics have been divorced.

4. Evangelical and Scholarly Debate on Biblical Grounds

There's an ongoing debate among evangelical scholars on how permissive Scripture is. David Instone-Brewer, in *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, argues from rabbinic and biblical texts that divorce is permitted for adultery, abandonment, neglect, and abuse. He writes that "divorce should occur only when marriage vows are broken" and that the church should give "practical and straightforward guidance". Critics like David Hillary argue this opens the door to unrestricted divorce and fails to treat Scripture as sufficient for ethics.

How people see it:

Traditional view: Marriage ends only by death; separation allowed, remarriage not.

Instone-Brewer's view: Four grounds for divorce, with remarriage possible for the innocent party.

Many laypeople are unaware of the debate and default to cultural norms.

5. Younger Generations: More Acceptance, More Hurt

Barna Group data show that among adults who have been divorced, 58% of Christians have remarried. Barna also found that 16% of practicing Christians say they have gone through divorce, nearly the same as non-Christians at 16%. How people see it: Younger Christians are less likely to see divorce as a permanent stigma, but they report feeling the relational and spiritual fallout. 20% of divorced churchgoers stop attending entirely, and 35% of their children stop too.

6. Cultural Pressure and “No-Fault” Mentality

John Witte Jr., in *From Sacrament to Contract*, argues that Western legal adoption of no-fault divorce weakened the cultural expectation of permanence, and the church absorbed that shift.

Focus on the Family notes: “The more you are involved in the actual practice of your faith... the greater difference this makes in strengthening both the quality and longevity of our marriages”. But when practice is weak, attitudes shift.

How people see it: Many see divorce as unfortunate but inevitable when “it’s not working.” The idea of covenant is replaced by a contract model—marriage lasts as long as both are happy.

7. The Underlying Tension

The 21st century church is caught between two forces:

1. Doctrinal ideal: Marriage as lifelong covenant reflecting Christ and the Church.
2. Pastoral reality: High rates of divorce among members, shame, and requests for remarriage.

Tim Keller argues the danger is losing the gospel witness when marriage breaks down. Pope Francis argues the danger is losing people when the church responds only with law and not mercy.

In the 21st century church, people see divorce as common, painful, and complex. Practicing believers still lean toward seeing it as a covenant breach to be avoided, while cultural pressure and lived experience push toward acceptance and pragmatism. The main pastoral question is how to hold both truth and grace without sliding into either legalism or permissiveness.

The Church as Custodian of Marriage in Society

5.7 Biblical Mandate, Theological and Historical Proof

According to Wayne Grudem (1994) the word “custodian” refers to guardian, protector, and keeper. The church doesn’t own the marriage God does [Gen 2:24]. But Scripture and history show the church is divinely appointed to guard, teach, model, and restore marriage in every society.

1. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION: God Delegates Custodianship to the Church

A. Marriage is God's Institution, Not Man's Marriage predates government, culture, and even the fall [Gen 2:18-24]. Because God instituted it, He gave responsibility for teaching it to His covenant people.

Proof:

1. Scripture: Mal 2:14 "She is your companion and your wife by covenant."

God calls marriage a "covenant" a term used for His relationship with His people. The church, as God's covenant community, must teach covenant faithfulness.

2. Jesus' Authority: Matt 19:4-6 Jesus appeals to Genesis, not Roman law, when asked about divorce. He positions Himself and His church as interpreters of marriage's meaning.

B. According to D.A. Carson (2000) the Church is "Pillar and Foundation of Truth"

1 Tim 3:15 calls the church "the pillar and support of the truth." Marriage is truth rooted in creation order [Gen 1:27, Matt 19:4].

Proof: When culture redefines marriage, the church must hold the line like a pillar holds a building.

2. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION:

Marriage Pictures Christ and the Church John Piper (2009) says Marriage is a Gospel Sermon Eph 5:31-32 "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to

Christ and the church.” God designed marriage to display the gospel: Christ’s covenant love for His Bride.

Custodial Implication: According to Stanley Hauerwas (1981) if the church lets marriage be distorted, the gospel picture gets distorted. The church must protect the image.

B. The Church is the “Family of God”

1 Tim 5:1-2 Paul calls believers “brothers and sisters.” The church is God’s household. Households guard family structures.

3. HISTORICAL PROOF: Everett Ferguson (2003) How the Church Acted as Custodian Across Centuries

Proof: The Didache, c. 100 AD, taught: “You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill him once born.” Same section condemned sexual immorality and divorce. The church drew the boundary.

B. Medieval Church [5th-15th Century]

According to T John Witte Jr (1997) the church took over marriage registration, courts, and teaching. Councils like Lateran IV required public vows and banns to prevent secret/forced marriages. [1215]

Proof: This wasn’t power-grab, it was protection. Without church oversight, women/children were abandoned.

C. Reformation and Modern Era [16th-20th Century]

Luther and Calvin insisted marriage be taught from the pulpit, not just handled by courts. They wrote marriage catechisms for parents.

Proof: Calvin's Institute Book 4, Ch. 19 gave pastors duty to counsel couples and discipline unrepentant adultery. Discipline, and support marriage as a divine ordinance." [Eerdmans][2006]

4. OBJECTIONS AND BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Objection 1: "Isn't marriage a state/civil matter?"

Response: Yes, Romans 13 gives state authority. But the state didn't create marriage [Gen 2]. The church guards the definition plus meaning while the state handles legal administration. When state redefines marriage contrary to Genesis, church must dissent [Acts 5:29].

Objection 2: According to Andreas J. Köstenberger (2004) "The church has failed too. Divorce rates among Christians are high."

Response: True. Failure doesn't cancel responsibility. Israel failed as custodian of the Law [Jer 2:8], but God still held them accountable. The solution is repentance plus renewal, not resignation [Rev 2:5].

5. CONCLUSION: Why Custodianship Matters If the church abandons custodianship, society loses:

1. Definition: Marriage becomes whatever culture feels.

2. Protection: Women, children, and the poor suffer most when covenant breaks [Mal 2:15- 16].

3. Gospel Witness: Eph 5:32 picture is blurred. People can't see Christ's love if they never see covenant marriage.

Final Word: Custodian is not equal to controller. The church serves marriage, not rules it. Like a museum guard, we don't create the art we protect it, explain it, and keep thieves from destroying it. The Art = God's design for one man + one woman for life [Gen 2:24].

5.8 How the Early Church and Church Fathers Handled Divorce

According to David G. Hunter (1992). The early church took a much stricter stance on divorce than Roman culture. While Roman law allowed men to divorce wives almost at will, the church fathers appealed to Genesis plus Jesus' teaching in Matt 19:6 and made marital permanence a mark of Christian identity.

1. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT: Rome vs. The Church

Roman Practice 1st-4th Century:

Under Roman is civiler, a husband could divorce by simply saying "I divorce you" 3 times and returning the dowry. No court needed. Women could initiate too, though less common. Remarriage was normal and quick. Adultery, infertility, and incompatibility were common grounds [Plutarch, Advice to Bride and Groom 32].

Church Response: The church rejected this as unbiblical. Marriage was covenant, not contract [Mal 2:14].

2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION THEY USED

All church fathers grounded their teaching in 3 texts:

1. Gen 2:24 “One flesh” – creation design [Matt 19:4-5]
2. Matt 19:6 “What God joined, let no man separate”
3. Matt 19:9 “Exception clause” for porneia sexual immorality

They debated what porneia meant, but agreed Jesus raised the standard far above Moses’ “certificate of divorce” [Deut 24:1].

3. TEACHINGS OF KEY CHURCH FATHERS 100-500 AD

A. The Didache, c. 100 AD

Teaching: “You shall not commit adultery... you shall not corrupt boys... you shall not fornicate... you shall not divorce your wife except for unchastely.”
[Didache 2:2, 5:1]

Stance: Aaron Milavec (2003). Only sexual immorality could break marriage. Even then, reconciliation was preferred.

B. Justin Martyr, c. 150 AD – First Apology 15, 29

Teaching: Justin told Emperor Antoninus Pius that Christians marry “for the purpose of begetting children” and “do not divorce except to prevent

fornication.” He contrasted this with Romans who “put away wives to marry others.”

Stance: Divorce for any reason other than adultery equal adultery.

C. Athenagoras of Athens, c. 177 AD – A Plea for the Christians 33

Teaching: “With us, a man who puts away his wife for any reason except adultery commits adultery by marrying another.” Michael W. Holmes (2007) added that even a second marriage after death of spouse was “a decent adultery.”

Stance: Extreme strictness. Some fathers saw remarriage after death as inferior, though not sin.

D. Tertullian, c. 200 AD – Ad Uxorem Book 1, 7; De Monogamia

Teaching: Tertullian taught “one marriage” as ideal. He allowed divorce only for adultery [Matt 19:9], but argued the divorced must remain single. If spouse died, widow/widower should not remarry.

Quote: William P. Le Saint (1951) “Christ prohibited divorce, which Moses had permitted... He recalled marriage to its original condition.” [Ad Uxorem 1.7]

E. Origen, c. 230 AD – Commentary on Matthew 14.23

Teaching: Thomas P. Scheck (2002) says Origen interpreted porneia broadly to include any serious sin that made “one flesh” impossible. But he still said remarriage after divorce was adultery

Stance: Allowed separation for safety, but not remarriage. For victims but theological rigidity.

F. Basil the Great, 329-379 AD – Canonical Letter 199, Canon 9 & 21

Teaching: Basil, writing as bishop, set church discipline. Canon 9: A man who divorces an adulterous wife and remarries is not guilty. Canon 21: A woman who leaves abusive husband is still “adulteress” if she remarries.

Stance: Double standard existed. Men got more leniency. He still required years of

Penance for remarriage in accordance with W.K.L. Clarke (1925)

G. John Chrysostom, 349-407 AD – Homilies on Matthew 62, 1 Cor Homily 19

Teaching: Chrysostom is the most balanced father. He strongly defended Matt 19:6: “Divorce was permitted because of hardness of heart, but Christ removes the concession.” He allowed divorce for adultery, and separation for abuse/abandonment [1 Cor 7:15], but discouraged remarriage.

Quote: “The bond of marriage is not dissolved even by adultery... better to bear with an adulteress than to marry another.” [Matt 62.3]

Teaching: According (1979) Elizabeth A. Clark Augustine shaped Western Church view for 1000 years. He taught 3 “goods of marriage”: proles’ children, fides fidelity, sacramentum permanence. The sacramentum meant bond lasts until death, even after adultery.

Stance: Separation allowed for adultery, but remarriage equal adultery.

Exception clause in Matt 19:9 refers only to separation, not remarriage.

4. CHURCH PRACTICE: Councils and Penance

Council of Arles, 314 AD Canon 10: “If a husband whose wife committed adultery marries another, he cannot receive communion.”

Council of Elvira, 305 AD Canon 8: “A woman who abandons an adulterous husband and marries another is not to receive communion even at death.”

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONCEPTS OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

6.1 God's Mind Towards Divorce

The Bible is firmly against divorce, and so is the church. Ideally, the Church is expected to be the closest example of all instructions inherent in the Bible. Individuals, families and societies are to look to the glaring examples set by the Church for right living. A recent study by a Harvard University professor linked regular church attendance with a lower divorce rate, concluding that couples who attend church together have a 47% less chance of divorcing, (Emily, 2011). Obviously Christians would attribute this to the transformative power of Jesus, who deserves the best full credit. But there are also practical ways that a church helps lower the divorce rate of attending couples. According to Jaynes W.H. (2001) churches have been historically anti-adultery and anti-divorce, and reasonably so since Scripture comes out strongly against both. When a couple attends church and goes through difficulties, they will be more likely to do the hard task of working through them rather than take the 'easy' option of divorce because divorce goes against church teaching. One of the greatest tools a church has to reduce the divorce rate is a thriving small group ministry, where couples can get together and do life with other couples. It is incredibly encouraging to discover that other

couples are going through what you're going through, that you're not alone and that you're not crazy.

Marriages can become incredibly insular and inward focused. As a church teaches through the Bible, a couple will hear an outside (God's) perspective on their marriage. That new perspective is incredibly important to a couple, giving them the insight needed to work through small problems before they become big problems. Something as simple as childcare can prevent divorce. Once kids come into the picture, it is increasingly difficult for spouses to interact with each other on an adult level and have the kind of meaningful interaction that becomes a preventative defense against divorce. With childcare provided on Sunday programs, churches allow kid-free adult interaction which goes a long way to strengthening a marriage. A growing church builds growing Christians. A healthy church grows healthy Christians. Whether it's mental, emotional, spiritual or interpersonal, a church provides numerous opportunities for personal development, all of which naturally spills over into a marriage relationship. As a spouse becomes stronger and more mature personally, their marriage becomes stronger.

When times are tough in a marriage, it's incredibly easy for a couple to lose hope and see divorce as the only feasible option. Whether it's a pastor, a marriage counsellor or a small group leader, a church provides a support option during a crisis, a lifeline that can save a marriage when hope seems lost. Hope is the most powerful

commodity in the world. A couple can work through any difficulty as long as they have hope for a better future. The church provides hope in spades. Through the transforming power of Jesus, the church rightly preaches that people can change, that wrongs can be forgiven and that marriages can thrive through the power of Jesus; that hope, in and of itself, is transformative.

6.2 Misunderstanding of the Concept of Marriage

First and foremost, there seems to be a misunderstanding as far as marriage in the twenty first century church is concerned. People are more and more ignorant of what the Bible says about marriage. From her Christian point of view, Emily (2011) states that people ignore what the Bible says about marriage. According to the Bible, “For this cause shall a man leave the father and mother”(Genesis 2:24). He explained that there should be a physical leaving to establish one’s own home so as to bond with the wife. But there are many people who are married but are still living in their father’s house with their wives. Sometimes, they might have left physically but are still living there in their mind. This is because it is their father’s and mother’s ideologies that are ruling the marriage. Every little matter the man will go and seek the consent and advice of the mother, father, brothers and sisters. Some women also do the same thing and these things are a recipe for divorce.

The issue of sex in marriage: Another major reason why Christians, especially in Imo state are divorcing today is because of sex. According to Akande (1997), sex

accounts for about 75% of why people seek divorce. According to him, a couple is able to endure a lot of problems in marriage when they enjoy a good sex life. But if the sex life is bad the least provocation stimulates nerves about the issues. He continued to argue that there is a need for sex education. The marriage counselors, pastors and elders should make an effort to take sex education in marriage seriously. He is of the opinion that pastors must be real. People presume pastors do not become angry and that everything is fine about their marriage². People compare their pastors and elders to their own spouse and begin to judge them. They should not pretend that all is well in their marriages. As they teach, if they need to use their own experience to advise, they should be real in themselves.

Infidelity or Extra Marital Affair: Fritsch (2013) suggests that infidelity or extra marital affairs has been one major cause of the increase in divorce in the world today. Unfortunately, too many couples face the challenge of infidelity, that is, one or both spouses have been sexually unfaithful. He explained that in this new age, society has got different avenues which enable people to get closely acquainted.³ There is increased interaction online and offline, which provide chances of greater interaction with others. It is much easier to make friends and remain in constant touch with them. Also, through the use of social media, thus, Facebook, Whatsapp, etc., people engage in greater interaction with outsiders and they spend less time with their spouses. As a result of this, some who overlook their faith and Christian affiliations

start to flirt around and begin having extra marital affairs. According to him, the above is on the increase and consequently has an impact upon the rate of divorce.

Maltreatment or Physical Abuse: Another well mentioned cause of divorce in the church today is maltreatment or physical abuse. Cherlin (1992), posits that there are behaviors that are clearly outside the moral boundaries of marriage. Any married couple has the right to be safe physically, emotionally, and sexually in their marriages. This includes adults and children. Cherlin argues that sometimes, pressure from work or other life involvements may result in an individual leading a highly stressed out lifestyle. As the stress accumulates, it automatically searches for avenues to let out the steam. The easiest avenue is one's spouse. Thus, a small argument may turn into a big fight and it may result in applying a violent method on the part of the husband or wife. Long term physical abuse can be a major factor in the decision to opt for divorce.

Monetary Issues: One major contributing factor to the alarming rate of divorce in the church today, according to Broemmel (2009) is monetary issues. In today's world, money plays an important role; perhaps more than before. Both Christians and non-Christians want money. The status of individuals is increasingly determined by material wealth and a lack of the ability to keep abreast with the peer group in this regard may cause unnecessary and avoidable stress on the marriage of two people. Even if there is a dearth of money to meet the basic household expenses,

there is bound to be a lot of friction between a husband and a wife on this account.⁵ any intolerable increase in finance related troubles could be a cause that leads to divorce.

Improper Marriage: In another interview with, Kim (2013) asserts that most Christians today are not properly married. There are some church going couples who perform the traditional rites just to show respect to the lady's family that he is interested in and ends there without acknowledging the church by means of a white wedding. There are yet others who enter into a relationship without any initial commitment but along the line pregnancy sets in and they are compelled or forced to marry.⁶ But with time the reality keeps hunting them that the partner was not the man or woman he or she wanted and this could also lead to divorce.

Extended Family Interference: Extended family interference in the lives of Christian couples may lead to divorce. If it happens that the extended family wants to rule the couple from outside that could lead to the divorce.

6.3 The Consequences of Divorce on the Church

Crepes (1992) emphasizes that divorce is always a disaster. It affects all those involved for the rest of their lives in ways we can hardly imagine. It is fair to say that no one ever emerges from a divorce unscathed or unaffected. Divorce is an exceedingly stressful event that tends to impact women more so than it does men. The stress involved affects the one who is "left" more than the one who "leaves".

Divorce can impair an individual's emotional wellbeing for at least five years after the event, producing a greater variety of long lasting negative feelings that even the death of the partner does not produce.

Legally, divorce is a single event, but socially, emotionally, and psychologically it is a chain of events, relocations, and radically changed relationships that result in broken families, changed lifestyles, economic hardships and a series of transitions that challenge, disrupt and modify the lives of individuals, promoting growth for some, and exposing personal vulnerabilities for others. While the word divorce implies finality, it needs to be recognized that divorce is a process that begins with a failing marital relationship and lasts long after what is probably the greatest emotional pain an individual will experience in life – the decision to separate and divorce, (Good, 1956).

Consequences on the Family: The post-divorce period with its emphasis on coping, survival, and recovery leads individuals into a radically altered lifestyle and the development of a significantly revised sense of personal identity. Emily (2001) highlights that the long term consequences of divorce are:

- ***Altered Family Structures:*** Divorce radically alters the structure of the family. It creates tense conflicts and divided loyalties. It forces parents to drastically adjust their parenting roles and embroils extended family members in a battle to reaffirm loyalties and realign alliances.

- ***Psychological and Emotional Trauma:*** The emotional trauma that occurs during the crisis of separation and divorce is enormously disruptive and debilitating. The sense of failure and loss that accompanies the marital breakdown frequently results in feelings of intense disappointment, bitterness, loneliness, dislocation and depression. The feelings of inadequacy and abandonment can be overwhelming. Research suggests that people who divorce constitute much higher risks for both psychiatric and physical disease. The experience of high levels of stress can lower the immune system's ability to protect the individual from infection and disease. The ongoing conflict and anger between the couple may lead to higher levels of stress and frustration and contribute to a loss of self-confidence, lower self-esteem and feelings of hurt, resentment, remorse and depression.
- ***Social Dislocation and Diminished Financial Resources:*** The breakdown of the marriage relationship inevitably leads to the disintegration and relocation of the family and a "downward mobility" of the family lifestyle with individuals being impacted by the change of economic and social conditions. The parent who has custody of the children (usually the mother) more often than not ends up as a struggling single parent with drastically diminished financial and material resources. The economic degradation that accompanies divorce is frustrating and humiliating for both parties. The re-location of

family members also means a change in their social networks of support, and a loss of contact with family and friends which serves only to isolate individuals more, resulting in further hurt, jealousy and anger.

- ***Distressed and Confused Children:*** Children are the innocent victims of divorce – the real losers (they lose their family, their security, their identity, and their protection). They have no say in a decision that profoundly affects the rest of their lives. As psychiatrist Carl Whittaker says, “When children are involved, there is no such thing as a divorce. The battles over parenting, access, maintenance and custody, don’t end with the legal granting of a divorce. Children end up being innocent bystanders who secretly hope that one day Mom and Dad will reunite and the emptiness they feel will go away.” According to Californian psychologist Judith Wallerstein, children continue to suffer the emotional repercussions 25 years after their parents’ divorce. She claims that the effect of the divorce is played and replayed throughout the first three decades of the child’s life and that its impact is both long lasting and cumulative. Wallerstein found that the biggest factor affecting the adjustment of children was not the divorce itself, but the psychological health of the parents and their involvement with the children.

Plenty of evidence exists to suggest that children from divorced families are put at greater risk for a variety of emotional and behavioral problems

including, oppositional or avoidant behaviors, acting out behaviors, aggression, and symptoms of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. Fifty per cent of children enter adulthood as worried, angry, and self-deprecating. Both boys and girls have trouble establishing and maintaining love relationships, with close to 40 per cent needing relationship therapy. Daughters of divorce are likely to develop attention-seeking behaviors, be sexually unhappy, anxious and depressed, and feel a profound lack of control over their lives. Sons of divorce take longer to adjust and tend to become more sexually aggressive, exhibit antisocial behaviors, and have more learning difficulties at school.

Consequences on the Church: A recent study reported in the Journal of Divorce and Remarriage (Volume 22, 1995) shows that, of those surveyed, only 17 per cent reported a decrease in their spiritual lives due to their divorce. Eighty-three per cent said that the divorce experience had ultimately strengthened their spirituality. This suggests that a significant spiritual vacuum and openness to God exists for those who experience divorce. The study, which included people from a wide range of Protestant and Catholic Churches in the United States, also showed that 42 per cent of people changed their religious affiliation as a result of their divorce, and that the majority of those who had made a change seem to be doing the best spiritually.

Thirty-three per cent of women surveyed indicated that their divorce was a catalyst for changing their religious understandings.

Divorce doesn't just affect individual families. When divorce rates rise in a congregation, it reshapes the church's ministry, theology, community life, and public witness. The effects are organizational, relational, and theological.

1. Membership and Participation Effects

a. Attendance and engagement decline

Divorced individuals, especially those who feel shamed or judged, often disengage from church. Studies show 20-30% of divorced Christians stop attending regularly in the 2 years following divorce. Single parents cite scheduling conflicts, childcare issues, and feeling out of place in family-focused ministries.

b. Shifts in demographic composition

High divorce rates increase the proportion of single adults, single parents, and blended families. Churches designed around the nuclear family model struggle to integrate these groups, leading to either adaptation or member loss.

c. Volunteer and leadership gaps

Divorce creates time, emotional, and financial strain. Divorced members are less likely to volunteer and more likely to step down from leadership roles. In

denominations with restrictions on divorced leaders, the pool of eligible leaders shrinks.

2. Pastoral and Ministry Burden

a. Increased counseling demand

Pastors report that marital and divorce-related counseling consumes 30-50% of pastoral care time. Most seminaries provide minimal training, so pastors feel unprepared and overburdened.

b. Ministry complexity

Divorce creates “blended” pastoral situations: co-parenting conflicts, stepfamily issues, custody disputes, and divided loyalties. One family’s crisis can spill into small groups, youth ministry, and church events.

c. Financial strain on the church

Divorce reduces household income and giving. Single-parent households give 20-40% less on average. Churches in high-divorce areas often face budget shortfalls, limiting outreach and staff.

3. Theological and Doctrinal Tensions

a. Doctrine vs. pastoral reality

Churches with a strict no-divorce/remarriage doctrine face a gap between teaching and the lived reality of members. This creates tension: enforce discipline and lose people, or adapt and face internal conflict.

b. Divisions within congregation

Divorce and remarriage are among the top issues causing splits in evangelical and mainline churches. Debates over biblical interpretation, discipline, and inclusion create factions.

c. Credibility and witness

When church leaders divorce, it damages congregational trust and external witness.

Conversely, when churches handle divorce with grace and clarity, it can strengthen credibility with the community.

4. Impact on Children and Youth Ministry

a. Ministry redesign needs

Traditional Sunday School and youth programs assume intact families. High rates of divorce force churches to create programs for children of divorce, single-parent ministry, and blended family support.

b. Faith transmission challenges

Children of divorce are less likely to retain religious affiliation into adulthood. Divorce correlates with a 15-20% drop in religious participation in the next generation, affecting long-term membership.

5. Community and Social Effects

a. Loss of social capital

Divorce fragments the informal networks that sustain church life. Extended family ties weaken, reducing intergenerational support and informal mentoring.

b. Stigma and silence

In some congregations, divorce remains stigmatized. This creates silence, prevents people from seeking help early, and pushes problems underground until they explode publicly.

c. Public witness and cultural engagement

Churches are often seen as either judgmental or morally lax on marriage. Both perceptions weaken their voice in public debates about family and marriage policy.

6. Positive Consequences and Adaptive Responses

Not all effects are negative. Divorce has forced some churches to grow in helpful ways:

a. Expanded pastoral care

Many churches developed divorce care groups, single-parent ministries, and professional counseling partnerships that now serve the broader community.

b. More honest theology

Congregations are forced to develop a theology of grace, forgiveness, and restoration that applies to real-life failure, not just ideal situations.

c. New ministry models

Churches have created small groups, mentoring, and community programs that address isolation and support single parents—ministries that benefit others beyond the divorced.

7. Denominational Differences

Catholic and Orthodox churches: Face challenges with annulment processes, Sacramental participation, and pastoral care for divorced/remarried members. Recent synods have pushed for more pastoral flexibility.

Evangelical churches: Struggle with balancing biblical prohibitions on divorce with high divorce rates among members. Many have shifted from exclusion to inclusion with accountability.

Mainline Protestant churches: Generally more accepting, but face declining membership partly linked to weak theological grounding for marriage.

8. Long-Term Consequences

If unaddressed, high divorce rates lead to:

- Smaller, older congregations as younger families disengage
- Loss of credibility on family issues in the public square

- Increased burden on pastors leading to burnout and turnover

If addressed well, churches become hubs for healing, prevention, and community support, which can stabilize families and attract people disillusioned with secular culture.

Key sources: Brad Wilcox's work on religion and marriage stability, Scott Stanley on community effects, and sociological studies by W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas Wolfinger on religion, divorce, and church participation.

Divorce forces the church to choose between becoming a place of legalistic exclusion or a place of redemptive community. The churches that treat divorce as both a pastoral crisis and a ministry opportunity tend to retain members, expand care ministries, and strengthen their witness.

6.4 The Role of the Church in Proffering Solutions to Divorce

Marriage is a covenant, a sacred bond between a man and a woman instituted by and publicly entered into before God and normally consummated by sexual intercourse. God's plan for the marriage covenant involves at least the following five vital principles:

Preaching Permanence of Marriage: Marriage is intended to be permanent, since it was established by God (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9). Marriage represents a serious commitment that should not be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. It involves a solemn promise or pledge, not merely to one's marriage partner, but before God.

Divorce is not permitted except in a very limited number of biblically prescribed circumstances.

Upholding Sacredness of Marriage: Marriage is not merely a human agreement between two consenting individuals (a "civil union"); it is a relationship before and under God (Genesis 2:22). Hence, a "same-sex marriage" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Since Scripture universally condemns homosexual relationships will never sanction a marital bond between two members of the same sex.

Advocating Intimacy in Marriage: Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships, uniting a man and a woman in a "one-flesh" union (Genesis 2:23 -25). Marriage involves "leaving" one's family of origin and "being united" to one's spouse, which signifies the establishment of a new family unit distinct from the two originating families. While "one flesh" suggests sexual intercourse and normally procreation, at its very heart the concept entails the establishment of a new kinship relationship between two previously unrelated individuals (and families) by the most intimate of human bonds.

Ensuring Mutuality in Marriage: Marriage is a relationship of free self-giving of one human being to another (Ephesians 5:25-30). The marriage partners are to be first and foremost concerned about the wellbeing of the other person and to be committed to each other in steadfast love and devotion. This involves the need for

forgiveness and restoration of the relationship in the case of sin. Mutuality, however, does not mean sameness in role. Scripture is clear that wives are to submit to their husbands and to serve as their "suitable helpers," while husbands are to bear the ultimate responsibility for the marriage before God (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; also Genesis 2:18, 20).

Perpetuating Exclusiveness in Marriage: Marriage is not only permanent, sacred, intimate, and mutual; it is also exclusive (Genesis 2:22-25; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). This means that no other human relationship must interfere with the marriage commitment between husband and wife. For this reason, Jesus treated the sexual immorality of a married person, including even a husband's lustful thoughts, with utmost seriousness (Matthew 5:28; 19:9). For the same reason, premarital sex is also illegitimate, since it violates the exclusive claims of one's future spouse. As the Song of Solomon makes clear, only in the secure context of an exclusive marital bond can free and complete giving of oneself in marriage take place.

The church occupies a unique position: it's a moral authority, a community, and a service provider. In the 21st century, its role has shifted from primarily adjudicating divorce cases to preventing marital breakdown and restoring families.

Here is additional how the church functions across prevention, intervention, and restoration:

1. Prevention: Building Strong Marriages Before They Break

a. Premarital Counseling and Preparation

Most churches require premarital counseling before marriage. When done well, it works: Covers communication, conflict resolution, finances, sex, in-laws, and expectations. Programs like PREPARE/ENRICH, FOCCUS, and SYMBIS reduce divorce risk by 30% in the first 5 years. The church can enforce a minimum number of sessions and use trained lay counselors, not just pastors.

b. Teaching a Theology of Marriage

Churches shape how members view marriage. A theology that frames marriage as covenant, not contract, raises the bar for commitment. Emphasizes permanence, mutual sacrifice, and purpose beyond personal fulfillment. Counters “expressive individualism” by teaching that marriage is about “we” more than “me.”

c. Marriage Enrichment and Mentoring

Ongoing programs keep marriages healthy: Marriage retreats, date nights, couples’ small groups. Mentoring: Pairing younger couples with older, stable couples for guidance and accountability. Churches that institutionalize mentoring see lower divorce rates than those that only react to crises.

2. Intervention: Responding to Marital Crisis

a. Pastoral Counseling. Pastors are often the first contact when couples are in trouble. Effective pastoral care: Listens without taking sides, assesses for abuse, and refers to professional therapists when needed. Integrates faith, prayer, and Scripture with practical counseling skills.

- Trained pastors can handle early-stage conflict; untrained ones can make it worse by giving simplistic advice.

b. Facilitating Reconciliation and Mediation

The church can act as a neutral third party: Mediates disputes over money, parenting, and extended family interference. Encourages confession, forgiveness, and restitution where appropriate. Church-based mediation is cheaper and less adversarial than court, which matters for low-income families.

c. Addressing Root Causes

Churches often run or partner with programs for:

- Financial literacy and debt counseling
- Addiction recovery groups like Celebrate Recovery
- Anger management and trauma support

These address the drivers of divorce, not just the symptoms.

3. Restoration: Healing After Divorce

a. Divorce Care and Recovery Groups

Most denominations now run divorce recovery ministries. These groups:

- Provide emotional support, reduce isolation, and normalize the grief process.
- Teach co-parenting skills and boundary-setting with ex-spouses.
- Help participants avoid rebound relationships and address guilt/shame.

b. Redefining Community Inclusion

Churches influence whether divorced members feel accepted or shamed.

- Teaching that grace applies to divorce as it does to other sins reduces stigma.
- Creating space for single parents, divorced individuals, and blended families in ministry roles and small groups prevents dropout from church life.

c. Child and Youth Ministry Support

Church programs for children of divorce provide stability, mentors, and a sense of belonging. This buffers the negative effects on kids.

4. Advocacy and Structural Support

a. Advocating for Family-Friendly Policies

Churches can advocate for affordable childcare, flexible work, and parental leave in their communities. Reducing economic pressure reduces divorce risk.

b. Partnerships with Professionals

Smart churches partner with Christian counselors, lawyers, and social workers. They refer out when issues exceed pastoral capacity and create a network of care.

c. Modeling Healthy Families

Church leadership must model stable marriages. Hypocrisy undermines credibility. When leaders are transparent about marital struggles and growth, it gives permission for others to seek help early.

5. Limits and Cautions

The church's role has limits:

- It cannot force reconciliation in cases of abuse, addiction, or adultery without safety.
- It must avoid legalism that shames people or theological error that traps people in dangerous marriages.
- It needs trained professionals. Pastoral care is not a substitute for licensed therapy in complex cases.

6. Evidence of Effectiveness

- Churches with structured premarital programs and mentoring report divorce rates 20-25% lower than the general population.

- Research by Wilcox and Dew shows active religious involvement correlates with higher marital stability, largely due to community support and shared norms.
- Faith-based counseling with trained professionals shows outcomes comparable to secular therapy for moderate marital distress.

The church's most effective role is preventive. By teaching a robust theology of marriage, providing skilled premarital and ongoing support, and creating a non-judgmental community for those in crisis or post-divorce, it can reduce divorce rates and mitigate harm when divorce occurs.

Strengthening Premarital Preparation and Marriage Education is discovered very important and essential. Premarital preparation and marriage education are preventive interventions designed to equip couples with skills, knowledge, and realistic expectations before marriage. The goal is to improve communication, reduce conflict, and lower the risk of divorce.

1. What Premarital Preparation Includes

Most programs focus on 4 core areas:

1. Communication and conflict management – teaching listening, “I-statements,” de-escalation.
2. Problem-solving skills – structured methods for resolving disagreements.
3. Risk and protective factors – education on finances, family background, substance use, aggression.

4. Expectations and commitment – aligning expectations about roles, intimacy, and marriage goals.

Common evidence-based models include:

PREP – Prevention and Relationship Education Program by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and colleagues.

PREPARE/ENRICH developed by David Olson.

PAIRS, RELATE, and Awareness & Choice Method.

2. Evidence of Effectiveness

a. Short-term and Skills Gains

Meta-analyses show premarital education produces immediate and short-term gains in interpersonal skills and relationship quality.

Carroll & Doherty's meta-analysis of 23 studies found an average 30% increase in measures of marital strength. Couples reported better problem-solving, effective communication, higher partnership, and better adjustment to married life.

b. Communication and Conflict Management

Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard & Carroll's 2010 meta-analysis of 47 studies found premarital education is effective at improving communication, especially when measured observationally. Effect sizes were small to medium for relationship quality, but moderate for communication.

c. Long-term Outcomes

Stanley, Amato, Johnson & Markman 2006: Using a random survey of 4 U.S. states, participation in premarital education was linked to higher satisfaction, commitment, lower conflict, and reduced odds of divorce. Effects held across race, income, and education. Markman ET al. 1988, 1993 according to him in a longitudinal study, the divorce rate for PREP participants was 5% vs. 24% for controls at 3-year follow-up. Nock et al. 2008; Stanley et al. 2006: Two longer-term studies found higher marital quality and lower divorce risk for couples who completed premarital education.

d. Mixed Findings

Some meta-analyses find modest or non-significant effects on relationship satisfaction when including unpublished studies. Sullivan & Bradbury 1997 found no difference in satisfaction/stability at 18 months. Researchers agree more long-term studies are needed.

3. Mechanisms: Why It Works

1. Skill Building: Couples learn concrete skills in communication and conflict management.
2. Help-seeking: Premarital education increases likelihood of seeking help later in marriage.

3. Realistic Expectations: Programs reduce unrealistic marital expectations, which is a risk factor for divorce.

4. Working Alliance: Effectiveness depends partly on the leader's relationship with the couple.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Moderators matter: Couples with high premarital negativity or aggression may not benefit as much from standard PREP.

Dosage and follow-up: Effects are strongest when couples retain skills long-term.

Delivery: PREP delivered by clergy and lay leaders can be as effective as university trained leaders.

6. Practical Implications

1. Start early: Engage couples 3-6 months before marriage.

2. Use evidence-based curricula: PREP, PREPARE/ENRICH, or Awareness & Choice method have empirical support.

3. Focus on skills, not just information: Observational measures show communication training has the largest effects.

4. Include follow-up: Booster sessions help maintain gains.

Premarital education is generally effective for improving communication and

conflict management, with modest but meaningful effects on marital quality and divorce risk. The strongest evidence comes from PREP and PREPARE/ENRICH, supported by Markman, Stanley, Olson, Carroll, and Hawkins. It works best as a prevention tool for couples without severe premarital aggression or negativity.

The ROLE of CHURCH LEADERSHIP, Lay Counselors, and Support Groups in Strengthening Marriage

Churches have historically been primary providers of premarital preparation and marital support. The roles are distinct but complementary: leadership provides theological authority and oversight, lay counselors provide accessible care, and support groups provide peer accountability and community.

1. Role of Church Leadership

a. Theological Framing and Vision

Church leaders set the theological foundation for marriage as a covenant, not just a contract. They teach God's design from Gen 2:24 and Eph 5:31-32, which shapes expectations and commitment.

b. Premarital Counseling and Approval

Pastors and priests traditionally conduct premarital counseling and determine readiness for marriage. Research shows clergy-led premarital programs can be as effective as those delivered by mental health professionals when using evidence-based curricula like PREP or PREPARE/ENRICH.

c. Accountability and Discipline

Leaders provide accountability when marriages are in crisis, applying Matthew 18 principles and offering pastoral discipline or encouragement toward reconciliation.

d. Public Advocacy

Church leaders advocate for marriage at the community level through sermons, marriage retreats, and public policy engagement.

Key authors:

Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* – emphasizes pastoral teaching on relational needs.

Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* – provides theological and practical framework used widely in church premarital programs.

Scott Stanley & Howard Markman – their PREP curriculum has been adapted for church/clergy use.

2. Role of Lay Counselors

a. Accessible First-Level Care

Lay counselors are trained volunteers who provide listening, encouragement, and basic skills training. They bridge the gap between professional therapy and informal peer support.

b. Delivery of Structured Programs

Many churches use lay couples to deliver PREPARE/ENRICH or SYMBIS assessments. Studies show lay-delivered programs retain effectiveness if facilitators are trained and supervised.

c. Mentoring and Peer Modeling

Older married couples mentor younger couples, modeling conflict resolution, financial management, and intimacy. This “peer modeling” increases credibility and reliability.

Key authors:

David Olson, PREPARE/ENRICH—designed for lay counselor administration.

Les Parrott & Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* — SYMBIS program relies heavily on trained lay facilitators.

Gary Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships*—developed lay-friendly communication tools.

Limitations: Lay counselors are not a substitute for licensed therapy in cases of abuse, addiction, or severe mental health issues. Supervision by a pastor or licensed counselor is essential.

3. Role of Support Groups

a. Normalizing Struggle and Reducing Isolation

Marriage support groups provide a space where couples realize they are not alone in facing conflict, finances, or parenting stress. This reduces shame and increases help-seeking.

b. Skill Practice and Accountability

Groups like Marriage Enrichment, Retrouvaille, and Marriage 911 provide structured exercises and peer accountability for applying skills learned in premarital education.

c. Post-Divorce and Blended Family Support

Support groups address specific needs: Divorce Care, Grief Share, and Stepfamily Support. They help individuals and families stabilize after marital rupture.

d. Evidence of Impact

Participation in premarital education is linked to later help-seeking behavior, meaning couples exposed to church support systems are more likely to use counseling when needed. Support groups also improve commitment and reduce feelings of being “trapped” in marriage.

Key authors/programs:

Steve Arterburn & Fred Stoeker, founders of Every Man's Battle and support group models. Retrouvaille Program, researched by Doherty & Carroll for post-crisis marital restoration. Marriage Enrichment research by Robert F. Stahmann shows improved marital satisfaction when couples engage in ongoing small groups.

Church leadership provides the theological and authoritative framework, lay counselors deliver accessible skills training, and support groups sustain change through community and accountability. When integrated, they form a preventive system that reduces divorce risk and strengthens marital quality.

Policy Recommendations for Church Boards and Denominations on Divorce in the 21st Century Church

Causes, Effects, and Suggested Solutions

1. Contemporary Causes of Divorce in the Church Context

Research identifies factors that affect both secular and church populations:

1. Communication breakdown and unresolved conflict –The most cited reason in marital therapy. Gottman's research identifies criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling as predictors of divorce.

2. Financial stress and economic pressure –A major predictor of marital instability, especially in urban contexts.
3. Premarital cohabitation and weak commitment– Stanley et al. found that premarital cohabitation correlates with lower marital satisfaction and higher divorce risk when marriage occurs.
4. Individualism and shifting cultural norms – 21st century emphasis on personal fulfillment weakens the “covenant” understanding of marriage.
5. Infidelity, substance abuse, and domestic violence – These remain primary grounds for dissolution even in churches.

2. Documented Effects on Individuals, Families, and Churches

For individuals and families:

Lower relationship quality and satisfaction for couples who do not engage in preventive education. Higher likelihood of later help-seeking when premarital education was received. Children experience lower academic, emotional, and social outcomes when high-conflict divorce occurs.

For churches:

- Reduced trust in pastoral authority when discipline is inconsistent.
- Loss of members when families disengage after divorce.
- Increased demand on pastoral care resources.

3. Policy Recommendations for Church Boards and Denominations

The goal is a tiered system: prevention → intervention → restoration/discipline → post-divorce care.

A. Adopt Evidence-Based Premarital Preparation as Policy

Recommendation: Require 6-8 hours of premarital education using validated curricula before church weddings. Rationale: Meta-analyses show premarital education produces immediate gains in communication and problem-solving, with a 30% increase in measures of marital strength. Longer-term studies find higher marital quality and lower divorce risk.

Authors/Programs:

- PREP: Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades
- PREPARE/ENRICH: David Olson
- SYMBIS: Les and Leslie Parrott

Policy language: “All couples seeking marriage in our churches shall complete an approved premarital program delivered by trained clergy or lay facilitators.”

B. Train and Deploy Lay Counselors and Mentors

Recommendation: Establish a lay counseling ministry using structured programs like PREPARE/ENRICH.

Rationale: Olson's model is designed for lay administration. Carroll & Doherty found lay-delivered programs effective when facilitators are trained and supervised.

Policy: Create a certification process for mentor couples, supervised by pastoral staff, to expand capacity beyond clergy.

C. Integrate Ongoing Marriage Enrichment and Support Groups

Recommendation: Make marriage support groups a normal part of church life, not just crisis intervention.

Rationale: Ongoing contact and accountability sustain gains from premarital education. Support groups reduce isolation and increase help-seeking.

Examples: Marriage Enrichment groups, Retrouvaille for couples in crisis, Divorce Care for post-divorce care.

D. Develop Clear, Pastoral Discipline and Restoration Policies

Recommendation: Create written policies on divorce and remarriage that balance biblical teaching, grace, and accountability.

Rationale: Inconsistent discipline undermines credibility. Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 7 distinguishes between believers and mixed marriages, and permits separation in cases of abandonment.

Key principles:

1. Uphold marriage as lifelong while recognizing exceptions for adultery and desertion.
2. Require counseling and mediation before proceeding to divorce.
3. Provide a clear process for restoration and, where appropriate, remarriage.

Authors: Gordon Fee, 1 Corinthians; Anthony Thiselton, 1 Corinthians; Craig Keener, and Marries Another.

E. Offer Mediation and Conciliation Services

Recommendation: Partner with Christian mediators to resolve disputes before they reach civil courts.

Rationale: Mediation reduces cost, time, and conflict, and preserves co-parenting relationships. Forrest Mosten's collaborative divorce model aligns with Christian peacemaking values.

F. Address Cultural Shifts Through Teaching and Discipleship

Recommendation: Preach and teach regularly on marriage as covenant, not contract, countering individualism.

Rationale: Tim Keller's *The Meaning of Marriage* and Stanley & Markman's work show that aligning expectations with a covenant framework improves commitment.

4. Implementation Guidelines for Boards

1. Audit current practice: What premarital, counseling, and post-divorce services exist?
2. Adopt written policies: Make expectations, processes, and grounds for discipline clear and public.
3. Budget for training: Fund lay counselor certification and counselor partnerships.
4. Measure outcomes: Track participation, satisfaction, and divorce rates among members over 3-5 years.
5. Coordinate with denominational bodies: Share curricula and training to avoid duplication.

The 21st century church needs proactive policy that moves beyond crisis response. Combining evidence-based premarital education, lay counselor deployment, ongoing support groups, and clear pastoral discipline creates a system that prevents divorce, restores marriages, and cares well for those affected.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bible is firmly against divorce, and so is the church. Ideally, the Church is expected to be the closest example of all instructions inherent in the Bible. Individuals, families and societies are to look to the glaring examples set by the Church for right living. A recent study by a Harvard University professor linked regular church attendance with a lower divorce rate, concluding that couples who attend church together have a 47% less chance of divorcing, (Emily, 2011). Obviously Christians would attribute this to the transformative power of Jesus, who deserves the best full credit. But there are also practical ways that a church helps lower the divorce rate of attending couples. Churches have been historically anti-adultery and anti-divorce, and reasonably so since Scripture comes out strongly against both. When a couple attends church and goes through difficulties, they will be more likely to do the hard task of working through them rather than take the ‘easy’ option of divorce because divorce goes against church teaching.¹ One of the greatest tools a church has to reduce the divorce rate is a thriving small group ministry, where couples can get together and do life with other couples. It is incredibly encouraging to discover that other couples are going through what you’re going through, that you’re not alone and that you’re not crazy.

Marriages can become incredibly insular and inward focused. As a church teaches through the Bible, a couple will hear an outside (God's) perspective on their marriage. That new perspective is incredibly important to a couple, giving them the insight needed to work through small problems before they become big problems. Something as simple as childcare can prevent divorce. Once kids come into the picture, it is increasingly difficult for spouses to interact with each other on an adult level and have the kind of meaningful interaction that becomes a preventative defense against divorce. With childcare provided on Sunday programs, churches allow kid-free adult interaction which goes a long way to strengthening a marriage. A growing church builds growing Christians. A healthy church grows healthy Christians. Whether it's mental, emotional, spiritual or interpersonal, a church provides numerous opportunities for personal development, all of which naturally spills over into a marriage relationship. As a spouse becomes stronger and more mature personally, their marriage becomes stronger.

When times are tough in a marriage, it's incredibly easy for a couple to lose hope and see divorce as the only feasible option. Whether it's a pastor, a marriage counsellor or a small group leader, a church provides a support option during a crisis, a lifeline that can save a marriage when hope seems lost. Hope is the most powerful commodity in the world. A couple can work through any difficulty as long as they have hope for a better future. The church provides hope in spades. Through the

transforming power of Jesus, the church rightly preaches that people can change, that wrongs can be forgiven and that marriages can thrive through the power of Jesus; that hope, in and of itself, is transformative.

7.1 Summary

After data were collected and analyzed, certain consensus were seen as important and are worthy of mention. Consequently, the summaries of data collected are:

- a. However desperate one was before getting a divorce, divorce does not give relief from stress, no matter how fulfilled a divorcee felt immediately after obtaining a divorce.
- b. Children of divorced parents are most likely to experience divorce in their marriages. It is only God that will make their homes not break.
- c. Those born into marriages that broke down, are most likely to be denied proper parental upbringing.
- d. Divorce does not in any way remove animosity between divorcees.
- e. Divorcees are most likely to resort to drunkenness, due to emotional instability.
- f. A divorce case has the ability to cause conflict in the church (especially among those who are close to the affected persons).

- g. Divorce has the capacity to cause both divorcee and their well-wishers to decline from attending Church service, and consequently, affect church growth.
- h. Rape, bully and drug abuse in society can be traced to marriage break-down.

7.2 Conclusion

This study is an eye opener in matters relating to divorce and its solutions. Data generated were analyzed and conclusions were drawn that the church has a key role to play in curbing the proceeding societal errors that exist around marriage and family. The study indicated that divorce rate is of late geometrically increasing, and there is the tendency of a rise if no drastic measures are taken to check it.

Also, the study revealed that lots of persons enter into marital relationships without a proper understanding of its demands. Consequently, when pressure and challenges show up, they quickly throw in the towel.

Furthermore, Jesus' words in the Holy Bible did not give sanction for divorce, rather, it frowned at it, e.g. "Let no man put asunder." In another portion of the scriptures, the Bible expressly pointed out that "...God hates divorce." His intent of marriage is that they might cleave to each other.

In addition, different cultures view divorce differently. Since culture is man-made, people give attention to their set of beliefs, values, and practices rather than God's word that judges all things (culture inclusive). The church is made up of people from

different cultures; this leaves the Church between two opinions; whether to accept or reject divorce. That is why some Churches grant divorce while others do not. If marriage was God's idea, let God's word rule it, not man's ideology.

7.3 Recommendation

The following suggestions have been made which if adhered to; there will be a change in the menace in the Church.

- a. Intending couples should as a matter of duty attend marriage seminars. This will help them even in the choice of marriage partner. This seminar should be constant both before and after the wedding.
- b. Government and religious groups should enact laws that do not accommodate divorce. The strictness of divorce laws help reduce divorce rates.
- c. Couples should in the course of their marriage attend counseling sessions; this will help them handle challenges.
- d. Clergies should visit each member's home from time to time; this visit will expose and resolve marital challenges before they escalate.
- e. A course on the "dangers of divorce" should be introduced in secondary school. This will help orient youths and arm them with relevant information before they go into marriage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adcock, A. C., and Demo D. (1994). *Family Diversity and Well-Being*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Akande, D. J. O. (1979) *Law and the Status of Women in Nigeria*. Nigeria: African Training Research Centre for Women.

Amato P.R. and Keith B., (1991). *Parental Divorce and the Wellbeing of Children: A Meta-Analysis*. *Psychological Bulletin* 110: 26-46.

Amato, P. R., (2000). "The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62:1269–1287.

Andrew J. Cherlin (2009) *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*

Awake. (2010). *Is divorce the answer?* New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Bassey, Sunday Benjamin, (2019) *spice and zest: unfurling the myths of marriage*, (Witty Will Publications and Still Waters Publications, Abuja, p184

Berger, P. (1973) *The Social Reality of Religion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Brault, K. D. and Kpesowo A. J. *Explain Divorce in the United States*. USA: *Journal of Marriage and the Family*.

Broemmel, Mike. (2009). *History of Divorce* (@ [www.answer bag.com/history of divorce](http://www.answerbag.com/history-of-divorce): 13 Dec. 2009).

Chelan, Andrew (1992). *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Publishers.

Chukwuemeka, G.S, (2010) *God's Approved Sex* (COEWA Publishers, College of education, Warri, February, p 186

Corners, Andrew. (1993). *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice*: Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Crepes, Earl G. (1992). *An article in the Pentecostal Evangel*. Springfield: Gospel Publishing House.

Douglas K. Snyder, Michele Harwood (1993) *Marital Instability and Divorce Outcomes: Issues for Therapists and Educators*

Duck, S. W. (1998). *Human Relationships*, 3rd Edition. Newbury Park: Sage.

Egret, Christopher. (1999). *An African classical Age: Eastern & Southern Africa World History*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press.

Ellis B. J. (2003). *Does Father's Absence Place the Daughter on Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?* *Child dev.* 74:810

Emerson Eggerichs (2004) *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needed*

Emily Doskow. (2011). *Polo's Essential Guide to Divorce*. Morton Hunt and Bernice Hunt.

Feiglemam W., Gorman B. S., and Varicella J.A., (1992). *Americans who Give up Religion. Sociology and Social Research* 76:138-143

Fritsch Stephen. (2013). *Will My Spouse Have To Pay My Attorney Fees?* (www.wikipedia.org/divorce: 12th April

Furstenberg, F., and Chilin A. (1994). *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents part?* Cambridge MA: Harvard university press.

Gary Chapman (1992) *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*

Geddes, S.D. (1985). *Belonging. Michigan: Academic Books.*

Goode, William J. (1956). *After Divorce. Illinois: The Fred Press.* Hauser, Philip M., ed. (1965). *The Study of Urbanization. New York: John Willy & Sons Inc.* 23-67.

Harville Hendrix (1988) *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*

Haskin, J. M. (1985). *Why so much Divorce: Marriage and Family in a changing Society. New York: Free Press.*

Hornsby, L. (2005). *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. Oxford University Press: Oxford:*

J. P. Lichtenberger (1931) *Divorce: A Social Interpretation*

Jacque S. E., and Serra C. A. (2001). *Parental Divorce and Premarital Couples: Commitment and other Relationship Characteristics. Journal of Marriage and Family* 63:637.

Jay E. Adams (1980) *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*

Jayne W.H., (2001). “*The Effects of Recent Parental Divorce on their Children’s Sexual Attitude and Behavior*”. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 35:125

John J. Anthony (1939) *Marriage and Family Problems and How to Solve Them*

John M. Gottman (1993) *What Predicts Divorce?: The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes*

John M. Gottman (1999) *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*

Juror Sidney M., (1995) “*The Transparent Self* (New York: D. Van No strand company) P.43

Keener, Craig. (1991). *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the New Testament*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishers. Keays C.L.M. (2002). *Social Civility in the United States*. *Sociological inquiry* 27:393. As cited in the *family America New research*, November 2002

Kim, Oliver. (2013). *Divorce Causes: 5 Mistakes That Leads To Divorce*. www.TheHuffingtonport-com.

King V. (2002) “*Parental Divorce and Interpersonal Trust Offspring*” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 No. 3: 64

Klatch, Alfred. (1980). *The Jewish Book of Why*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers.

Lesthaeghe, Ron. (1989). *Reproduction and Social Organization in Sub Saharan Africa*. California: University of California Press.

Lisa Strohschein. (2017) “*Challenging the Presumption of Diminished Capacity to Parent: does Divorce Really Change Parenting Practice?*” *Family Relations* 56, 358-368.

Locke, J. (1993). *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. U.S.A: Hackett Publishing.

Mac Kimono C. E., Cune H. B., and Stone man Z. (1982) “*The Effect of Divorce and Marital Employment on the Home Environment of Preschool Children*” *Child Development* 53:1392-1399.

Marilyn Coleman, Lawrence H. Ganong, Mark Fine (2010) *Handbook of Divorce and Relationship Dissolution*

Mavis Hetherington E, John Kelly (2002) *For Better or for Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*

Michele Weiner-Davis (1992) *Divorce Busting: A Step-by-Step Approach to Making Your Bad Marriage Great*

Miller, G. R., and Parks, M. R. (1982). "Communication in Dissolving Relationships." in *Personal Relationships*. London: Academic Press.

Morton, Hunt and Bernice, Hunt. (1977). *The Divorce Experience*. New York: Megrin-Hill Book Company.

- Myers S.M (1996). *An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: the Importance of Family context*. *American sociological Review Sociological Review* 61: 864-5
- Noida, Eugene A. (1954). *Customs and Culture*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- O'Brien, J. M. (2001). *As wife and husband: Deconstructing gender in Malachi*. Chicago: JBL.
- Orji, Chukwuemeka (2013). *The New Definition of Marriage*. Enugu: Aryan Press.
- Pamela, Long. (1997). *Born-Again, Others Divorce at Same Rate*. News and: BAMA Research Group.
- Parish S.T (1988). "Evaluation of Family as a Function of One's Family Structure and Sex" *Perceptual and Motor Skill* 66:25-26
- Paul R. Amato, Alan Booth (1997) *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval*
- Paul R. Amato., and Tamara D. Afifi., (2006). "Feeling Caught between Parents: adult's Children's Relationship with Parents and Subjective Well-Being". *Journal Marriage and Family* 68, no 1: 231.
- Phillips, Roderick. (1988). *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 223-256.
- Piper, J. (2007). *This momentary marriage: A parable of permanence*. Crossway.
- Price J. and McKinney, Patrick C. (1988). *Divorce*. Texas: Sage Publication

Robbins, Michael A. *Divorce Reform: New Solutions not a Return to Fault.* Michigan: M. Gary Newman.

Roderick, Philip. (1991). *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Sharon,

Stephanie Coontz (2005) *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*

Steven A. VanDyke (2023) *Marriage Is Only 50/50 In Divorce*

Thornton, A. (1985). *Changing Attitudes towards Separation and Divorce: Causes and Consequences.* USA: American Journal of Sociology.

Tim Keller (2011) *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*

Wallenstein J.S, and Blakeslee (2004). *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children A Decade after Divorce.* Boston, MA. Houghton Muffin 56-78.

Wallenstein Judith S., and John Berlin Kelly. (1996). *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce* (New York, NY: Basic Book) 224-225.

Wayne, Tito J. (2004). *Addressing the Unpopular Africa.* Cape Town: Facts on File Publishers.

Weiner, Michele Davies. (2001). *The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-step Program for Saving Your Marriage.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Willard F. Harley Jr. (1986) *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*

William A. Galston, David Chiriboga (1991) Divorce: Crisis, Challenge, Or Relief?

William J. Doherty, Steven M. Harris (2023) Helping Couples on the Brink of Divorce, 2nd Edition

Zernike, Kate. (2007). Why Are There So Many Singles in Americans? New York: NY Times.

Journals

Calvin Theological Journal. (1966-present). Calvin Theological Seminary.

Christian Education Journal. (2004-present). Biola University / Sage.

City Journal, <https://www.city-journal.org>>article>Why-Marriage-is...

Ecclesiology. (2004-present). Brill.

Ewherido, Angus; Abuja Residents Lost Factors that can lead to Failed Marriage, Marriage and Family, Vanguardngr.com (3 February, 2015)

Family Process. (1962-present). Wiley.

Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies. (1951-present)Wiley. Foundation.

Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology. (1947-present). Sage.

Journal of Biblical Counseling. (1993-present). Christian Counseling & Educational

Journal of Divorce & Remarriage. (1988-present). Taylor & Francis.

Journal of Family Psychology. (1987-present). American Psychological Association.

Journal of Family Therapy. (1979-present). Wiley / Association for Family Therapy.

Journal of Marriage and Family. (1941-present). Wiley.

Journal of Pastoral Theology. (1991-present). Taylor & Francis.

Journal of Psychology and Christianity. (1982-present). Christian Association for

Journal of Psychology and Theology. (1973-present). Biola University / Sage.

Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. (1958-present). ETS.

Los Angeles Times, I.A. TIMES ARCHIVES, (Jan 5, 1997, 12AM PT)

Marriage & Family Review. (1980-present). Taylor & Francis.

Pastoral Psychology. (1950-present). Springer.

Princeton Theological Review. (2004-present). Princeton Theological Seminary.

Print Newspapers, 4000 Divorce cases in two Months: Which Way Family Values?

<https://www.blueprinting.com/4000-divorce-cases-in-2-months-which-way-family-values/> (28 February, 2020)

Psychological Studies.

Review & Expositor. (1904-present). Sage/Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Theological Studies. (1940-present). Sage / Jesuit School of Theology.

Internet Sources

A 1935 song written by Cahn, Sammy; and music by Heusen, Jimmy Van; Wikipedia,

<https://en.wikipedia.org>>wild>love_and_marriage

Afunugo, Kenechi Nnaemeka, Rethinking the Christian vow of matrimonial indissolubility amidst persistent domestic violence in contemporary Nigerian marriages 2025

Challenges in Christian Marriages and its Effect on the Church, [eduschooler.com](https://www.eduschooler.com).

Accessed on June 25, 2023

Childs, Stanley II; Christian Marriage in Nigeria, 1946, [jstor.org](https://www.jstor.org). Accessed on June 18, 2023

Covenant Attachment: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of Christian Couples

DOAJ-Twenty-First Century Challenges for Sustainable Christian Marital Relationships in the Nigerian

Effects & Church Response. The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline 2012

Global Journal of Human-Social Science Till Circumstances Do Us Part: A Socio-Ethical Analysis of Divorce among Christians in Nigeria 2019

Institute for Family Studies – Church Can Strengthen Your Marriage

Link: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/857>

Link: <https://doaj.org>

Link: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7562>

Link: <https://ifstudies.org>

Link: <https://journals.sagepub.com>

Link: <https://socialscienceresearch.org>

Link: <https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk>

Link: <https://www.christiancentury.org>

Link: <https://www.mdpi.com>

Link: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline>

MDPI-The Lived Experience of Divorcing Evangelicals and How Integrated, Empathetic, and

Practice on marital solidarity and divorce in Britain, 1985-2005_ 2010

Protective Factors & Solutions

Restorative Practice Can Disclose God to Them

Styles, Frederick, Divorce in the Christian Society and a Prescriptive Model to Rekindle the Marriage Bond 2014

The Christian Century– Divorce culture: A congregational challenge

UROKO, Favour & ENOBONG, Solomon I. Divorce amongst Christian couples in Yoruba land: Challenges and implications 2022

Warwick Research Archive Portal– Does religion make a difference? Christian affiliation and