

## **DIVORCE AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract**

*The phenomenon of divorce and its effects is one of the contending issues that are affecting the Nigeria contemporary Christian Church and the general society. Divorce goes against the Biblical injunction that "what God has joined together, let no one put asunder" (Mark 10: 9). This study which is descriptive, expository and historical in nature examined the phenomenon of divorce and its effects in contemporary Christian Church in Nigeria. The data is drawn from both primary and secondary sources from married couples, divorcees, priest, pastors, evangelists, lawyers, Church elders and children from divorced families. This was done to ascertain possible factors which predispose couples to divorce and the effects on the Christian Church in Nigeria. It is found that witch craft and mystic powers, introduction of money into marriage, wrong choice of a partner, alcoholism, mixed marriages, childlessness, adultery, quarrels, and inadequate/poor financial management predispose Christian couples towards divorce. The work revealed that when divorce occurs, the effects are always negative especially upon children and the Church. Christians believed that Christ's teaching on marriage and divorce is unquestionable, and therefore all Christians should embrace the teachings of Jesus Christ on marriage and divorce and use it as a model. Christ disapproved divorce and therefore all Christians should follow the footsteps of their master and embrace the institution of marriage with sacrificial Love and Total commitment with one another thereby avoiding divorce at all cost. The study also recommended that training of*

*personnel's be made compulsory by the Church in order to counsel intending couples before marriage and after marriage.*

## **Introduction**

Divorce is one of the core vices that have posed a lot of challenges to human kind in different dimensions. This is true in that, the problem of divorce is not just to Christians alone but people from all works of life. According to Jay, there is hardly a Christian family or society that does not know the pains of divorce directly or indirectly. He said, in medieval era, homes were held in high esteem where the husband and wife stayed together to fulfill the plans and purpose of God for their lives (140). In recent times, divorce has become one of the greatest threats to society, for it destroys one of the most basic societal institutions, the family. The threat is even greater to Christians today because of its numerous problems associated with it.

Since there cannot be divorce without marriage, Scott defined marriage as an institution ordained by God to be a permanent, indissoluble life-long covenant relationship and union between a man and a woman for the purpose of fulfilling an innate need for community and procreation (14). Procreation and companionship are the basic twin purposes for marriage. However, companionship seems to be superior because it is possible to have a real marriage without children, but without companionship the production of children does not fulfill the purpose of marriage.

In recent times, the ever-increasing number of divorce have been posing a serious threat to the marriage institution which is valued very highly by all human cultures and religious traditions. Dominion explained that a careful examination of the contemporary nature of marriage will reveal the exact change. Hence, a healthy family is imperative for a healthy society and the church at large (14). Christian, Traditional and Islamic religions generally have certain ways of conducting marriages and how such marriages are expected to be guided by certain rules and regulations of such faiths. It is therefore true that people in all cultures and in all ages have considered marriage as a natural gift to humanity. It can therefore be said with certainty that the institution of marriage is one that is natural and common to all human kind.

In most cultures, neither man nor woman is considered incomplete after reaching a certain age without a spouse (Nwoye and Nnena71). Though, all religious

traditions highly value the institution of marriage, Christianity holds the institution of marriage in a more exalted position in comparison to all other religions. It is, however, not surprising that, the sublimity of Christian teachings has not deterred some of its followers from seeking civil divorce. Christians in Nigeria are also experiencing the effects of divorce in different ways, for the inability of a couple to understand what marriage leery is, marks the beginning of conflicts between a husband and a wife which sometimes results into divorce. It is upon this fact then that this write up undertake to investigate the various factors which predispose people to divorce and possible effects of divorce among Christians in contemporary Nigeria with the view of suggesting ways of reducing those factors which predispose people to divorce and also to point out how the church can assist in solving the problem of divorce in our societies today.

### **Marriage**

Marriage is one of the fundamental institutions of the society that guarantees the stability of the home and the society at large. In Tiv society for example, marriage is referred to as *Ivese Kwase or Kwase eren*. Marriage is expected to be between a matured man and a matured woman as could be agreed by the community concerned. Relatively, Baker states that marriage is a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any). The universality of marriage is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions it performs, such as procreation, regulation of sexual behaviour, care of children and their education and socialization, regulation of lines of descent, division of labour between the sexes, economic production, consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for social status, affection, and companionship (74).

Supporting the above view, Clerk sees marriage as a social relationship between a man and a woman potentially enjoying beyond the birth of children (28). Nwoye and Nnena on the other hand describes marriage as a life-long, universal, sacred and highly respected solemnized human institution characterized by happy living in home devoid of conflict. Maturity is required of those willing to be joined together in order to persuade and dialogue with each other for peaceful co-existence (15). Thus, a Christian marriage can be describes as a union between a Christian man and a woman for the mutual well-being of the spouses and for the procreation and upbringing of children as originally ordained by God.

## **Divorce**

Different scholars have defined divorce the way it suite them. According to Wegh, divorce in Tiv means *ivaa paven*, that is, total separation between a man and a woman who are legitimately allowed to perform conjugal functions. He also defined it as the total breakdown of the agreement between the husband and wife either in the court of law or ordinarily (45). Divorce as used in the context here would therefore refers to annulment, disunion, separation, split up and so on not necessarily a legal termination of marriage since the population of people who legally end their marriages are few in churches.

Robin on his part describes divorce as any home by which parents are not living together with their children as the normal family relationship. He also said that, divorce is an abnormal home relationship which has permanent effects upon the children's ability to do their works in the school normally responsible for their low grade in class and other difficulties in life (30). *The New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* describes divorce as the legal dissolution of a marriage (74). The concept is therefore, viewed as the official ending of marriage, especially when married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counseling.

## **Church**

The word church is relieved from the Greek term *ekklesia*, meaning, an assembly of those who are called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ. (*Encyclopedia Biblical Christianity* 71). It is from this perspective it is understood why the Church is spoken of as 'the elect', 'the saints' and why Jesus asked Peter to 'build my Church' (Mt 16:18). In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church was seen as 'the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts' (Kanu 2012). To Roman Stoicism, the Church is principally seen as 'a well ordered community governed by laws'. In the early Church, they were referred to as 'the people of God' or 'the Church of God'. St Paul speaks of the Church as "the fullness of Christ and of fellowship" (Ephesians 3:19). He also speaks of the Church as "a mystery and sacrament of salvation" (Eph 3:4) (Kanu & Obiefuna 2014). According to Opedia, various problems have risen as a result of multiple usage of the term church. He however defines the church as a gathering of citizens called out of their homes into public places (47). In other words, it is a group of believers gathering together in a specific city usually for the worship of Christ. In Tiv land, Church is usually referred to as *Iyough Adua, Iyough Imsen, I Jir Icivir Aondo*(a place of prayer/ worshipping God).

## **Causes Of Divorce In Nigeria**

The following are some of the causes of divorce in Nigerian Christian societies. These include:

**(1). Childlessness:** Till today, many people believe that the essence of marriage is to procreate in order to prolong the family lineage. Describing the importance of children to Tiv people in particular, Tarbo asserted that, procreation is the main purposes of marriage among the Tiv. Every normal Tiv man desires children above other things. To a Tiv man, all other devices for having children such as adoption are considered unnatural. Having children to a Tiv man means eternal life (56).

This shows that many people considered children as the consummation of the matrimonial union. It is only when children are born to marriage that they believes God has blessed it for the happy and perpetual survival of the spouse. Corroborating the above veiw, Torkula asserts that, expression of love between couple is a secondary reason for marriage in Tiv land and as such, is not considered very necessary in the union if children are not produced. He further stated that, the essence of marriage is to bear children and also to supply labour on the farm for feeding of the family. This explains to a large extent, why Tiv marriage invariably becomes terminated in the event of childlessness (14-15). The persistent disunity between couples can eventually leads to divorce. Until a woman begot a child in marriage, she is considered a visitor (Orvanya). This is because no matter how long she lives with the man, sooner or later, she will leave as a visitor would do.

**(2). Choosing of Wrong Marriage Partner:** Since it has become easy for young men to marry, many of them just choose their marriage partners without proper examination. It is however amazing that their refusal to consult neither church leaders nor traditional elders has paved way for continuous conflict in the family. Nicholas says that naturally, marriage unites people but it also inevitably breeds conflicts. Conflict between husband and wife are common all over the world and when they are creatively resolved, the marital relationship is strengthened (Ela 13). Tiv, like many societies or traditions in the world, do not marry with the intention of divorcing each other.

**(3). Adultery and Quarrelling:** In any society (whether early, modern or contemporary), adultery represents a vexing problem in marriages. Adultery is defined by moral theologians as the “act of sexual intercourse between a married

man and a woman not his wife or between a married woman and a man not her husband” (Miller 151). One of the essential features of adultery is that one of the parties involved must be married. However, when both adulterers are married, the guilt becomes compounded. Adultery is considered a serious crime to society. It is such a serious crime that even the Mosaic Law forbids it.

The Law of Moses prescribes penalties against those committing adultery. In the covenant, he made with the Israelites that God includes adultery among the sins that must be avoided. The Book of Exodus states that followers of God must not commit adultery (Hagin 31). Couples must make efforts to be faithful to one another. This will then help them to consolidate their relationship. Many do say that, is not easy for one to remain faithful to one's spouse when the world is applauding faithless spouse. As a result, adultery may lead to divorce of a valid marriage among Christians when the couple does not accept the situation to forgive the guilty and adulterous partner peradventure, it occurs.

As regards quarreling as one of the causes of divorces, one can be bold to say that in many societies, some couple has failed to achieve the ideal marriage, meaning that, some couple does not live in harmony with one another. Such couples need to be pitied, because they are missing the blessings and joys of married couple. Some couple may also have conflict with one another, such that it does not encourage good relationship in the family.

Quarrels, strife, rifts, and disharmony are incompatible with peace and may leads to friction between husband and wife. Quarrelling is unhealthy in a relationship and poses a big problem for married life. It is natural for couples to have misunderstandings but the couple should not allow these disputes to be prolonged. In family life, incompatibility, hot temper, poverty, or negligence may be the root cause of quarrels. Furthermore, many husbands and wives might engage in the misguided pursuit of wealth.

**(4). Polygamy:** Marrying more than one wife, which is a common life style of a Tiv man in our society, has no doubt increased divorce among Christians in Tiv Land. There hardly remains the expectation a marriage will last for a life time. Fred who is a close associate of Scott, in his book *The Global Acceptance of No Fault Divorce and its effects on Marriages* captures that polygamy and its effects explained the devastating effects on marriages as quite embarrassing, giving no fault divorce and polygamy as a major factor of divorce among Christians and the entire society (1). What God has joined together, nothing shall put asunder.

As a result no man should at any point divorce his wife for any reason and no woman should at any point divorce his husband for any reason for their union is forever, only death can separate them.

**(5). Alcoholism and Financial Challenges:** Some husbands, as well as wives, are addicts to alcohol. They expend much of their time, resources and energy on drinks. They spend less time to train and direct their children. As a result, husbands leave their domestic affairs to their wives or vice versa, who have little or no money for this purpose. Husbands and wives should guard against this, because excessive drinking is detrimental to the maintenance of the family. According to Rev. Fr. Igbangohol, alcohol has ruined some Christian's homes in many societies. An alcoholic husband, for example, can hardly make a reasonable and constructive decision regarding the running of his family. He is only interested in spending his money on drinks. The effects of alcohol are harmful. When a man gets drunk, he neglects the affairs of his house. He will no longer support his family as he ought, and he may even beat his wife. In the face of alcoholic abuse, the family falls into danger (Oral Interview). Something has to be done in such situations; otherwise, alcoholism may leads to marriage disintegration.

As regards financial difficulties as one of the causes of divorce, it is a statement of fact that Money is very powerful to every society and it has been also said that the love of it is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6: 10). Aga observes that money can often be a troublemaker therefore, couples should be very careful in dealing with money (Oral Interview). Financial difficulty is today considered as one of the leading causes of divorce among the Christian families.

**(6). Changes in Socio-Economic Structure of our Society:** Economic dissimilarities between the spouses are another contributing phenomenon on divorce. The change in socio-economic structure has brought tension between the expectations of family life coming from traditional cultural values and what is desirable, possible or affordable for the young family today. In the traditional sense of family, the husband was the income earner and the wife was to be in charge of the home and children but in the modern Christian society women are also allowed to pursue careers to support the economic needs of the family. Fanner explains that the change in the structure of the family has put young married couple in a position of disadvantage as they have lost out on the wisdom of God's initial plan for marriage, because of that, can send their spouse away without any re- think of what God actually meant for two to come together as

husband and wife (33). In the concept of the traditional family, elders were part of the household; the wife is responsible for managing the home and the children, while the husband is seen as the income earner. The sudden change in family structure which does not mandate women to work has made a lot of men to restrict their wives from working in public sectors as such it has discouraged a lot of couples who feel are in bondage therefore resulting into divorce as an alternative means for freedom, but has greatly influenced the permanency of marriage negatively (277).

**(7). Modern Social Structure:** John and Sanford have emphasized that, the increasing number of annulments in the church and divorces in the civil courts can to a large extent be traced to modern social structure (295). It is a structure in which young couples are deprived of the witness elements of unity and fidelity that give rise to the joy of living. Before, marriages were kept for long because couples were allowed to stay together unlike the present situation. Jack associates himself with John in explaining social factors in his book *Dynamics of Marriage: Love, Sex, and Growth from a Christian Perspective* describes social factor that; Within the overall global transformation, sociologist and psychologist have identified factors responsible such as age, premarital pregnancy, early marriage, lack of assortative mating, and social class. The changed outlook on marriage and divorce is another contributing factor as such, divorce is more socially and personally acceptable today than they were in the past due to unwillingness to endure unhappiness in marriage, the liberation of women and the rise of women's movement (143).

**(8). Technological Factor:** No one can deny the immense good of modern technology. At the same time, the evil it has brought into the family life cannot be over looked especially on television and internet which have greatly invaded on our Christian homes and the society as a whole. Appathurai asserted that, the twentieth century initiated the disintegration of the extended family. The faster modes of transportation and better tools of communication have made the world-smaller and smaller but the distance between the members of family grows wider and wider since communication can be done in any part of the world through telephones and laptops (99). These modern electronic instruments instead of facilitating the strengthening of relationships often times keep couples apart, thus contributing to the growth of divorce, a clear example is the use of internet (106). Day by day more and more children, youth and adult are becoming addicted to internet. Priyamko who has a similar view with Appathurai describes the sad effects of technology says that, it is hard to believe



that even on friendship day, people do not want to visit and greet their friends personally, but prefer doing it through the net (10). Many who are addicted to net pornography are not able to maintain satisfactory sexual relationships in their married life thereby contributing greatly to the growth of divorce cases among Christians in the world.

**(9). Psychological Factor:** Concerning psychological factor as a cause for divorce, Jack in his book *Dynamics of Marriage* has clearly given detail on how marriage came to be bitter within few years. He also explains how psychological maturity is expected to be experienced in one's life before going into marriage since it is a life affair. He asserts that, psychological factor play a very important role in the making of success or a fracture in any marriage (143). Also, those who because of psychological nature are unable to assume essential obligations of marriage are incapable of contracting marriage. However, there is the personality disorder that plays havoc in marriage relationships which includes the availability of contraceptive and the emergence of feminism.

Explaining more on psychological factor Alana posits that, the psychological factor is not vulnerable to tensions over sexual fidelity and jealousy, most important, however is the fact that, when these relationships terminates, they leaves emotional wounds and the need to express great is always seen whenever they meet. People who experience these in relationship usually begin to develop a companion attitude. Such behavior clearly reveals their lack of psychological maturity therefore enter into unstable relationships for life, psychological maturity is required between both.

**(10). Lack of Proper Orientation:** Kerby comprehensively examined the Epidemic of Divorce from a Christian Perspective. He presented the data on its impacts on families and society and compared the trend with biblical teaching on the subject in his book, *Divorce: A Biblical Christian Perspective*. He opined that families are experiencing many problems today. The divorce rate increased in the 1960s due to government and religious leaders' inability to checkmate divorce factors with the aim of providing lasting solution upon. He states that until 1960s, divorce has been a relatively rare phenomenon. Certainly, there have always been some couples who have considered divorce as an option. It is worth to know that, the fundamental changes in our society and Christianity in the last few decades have changed divorce from being rare to routine (1).

Scott in his book "Reducing the Divorce Rate among Christians in America" explains that divorce rate is on increase due to little or no attention given to premarital counseling by church leaders. It is estimated that majority of first wedding approximately seventy five percent occur in a church setting (4). While some churches require premarital preparation, many do not. Of those that do not, all of them have a formal programme designed to train and equip couples on how to effectively deal with the issue that can become catalyst for disharmony, disunity and eventual dissolution of their marriages (5). As a result, many couples enter marriage ill-equipped and overly idealistic with regard to hold harmony between one another. Couple should be exposed to potential areas of incompatibility regarding goals, values and ways of dealing with conflict. The inability of pastors and church leaders to bring trained facilitations to help educate intending couples is promoting divorce among Christians.

**(11). The Adoption of no Fault Divorce Law:** The laws governing marriage historically were based upon the Christian belief that marriage was for life (Kerby 11). That is, marriage was intended to be a permanent institution but divorce came into being as a result of self-justification because it have legally been approved for circumstances that were known to be exceptional cases, such exceptional cases have to be proved by the parties concern, shifting the greater portion of fault to one person. The person found faulty recognized as justifying the dissolution of the marriage mostly, it lingered on adultery, fornication and sometimes unfaithfulness.

The adoption of no fault divorce law by state legislatures has encouraged divorce to move on jet speed. The current no fault provisions changes the original perspective of God's plan on marriage. Marriage is no longer viewed as a covenant but as a local contract, a less reliable contract than a standard business contract (Kerby 14). With no fault divorce, the institution of marriage is devastated. Thus, all marriages are at risk both those officiated by the Christian ministers and those handled by the traditionalist. This is because marriages at present only assume marital responsibilities during honeymoon.

**(12). Witchcraft and Mystical Powers:** There is a general belief among Tiv people that every event including marriage, divorce, sudden deaths, prosperity and soon have causality. Many hold that one cannot just die or live happily unless there is connection with witchcraft or mystical powers (tsav or akombo). Good events are associated with benevolent while evils such as death, breaking of marriages and so on, are connected with bad witchcraft. According to Torkula, a

good marriage can change overnight for bad through the application of witchcraft (tsav) for such people; both Christians and traditionalist are affected alike. The couple could be struck with magical-religious correction called *ashwe* (Red Sole) (11). In cases of defeat during courtship by another girl or man, the defeated may vows to end such marriage. It can be used through another magical- religious substance called *agina*. When such eventually happened the lady would be rendered sick periodically (agba agina), such a lady becomes a sicklier and matrimonial burden which may demand propitiation of relevant deities.

### **Effects Of Divorce On Christian Families And The Church**

Several effects of divorce have been experienced in different societies with its gravity on children, parents, the church and the whole society at large. Thus, these effects could be seen in the area of ethics and social-orientation.

**(A). Divorce leads to Massive Dissolution of Families:** Hardon observes that the effects of divorce on society are drastic. He argues that the children of divorced parents suffer the worst effects of divorce. He adds that divorce leads massive dissolution of families which in turn hurts children (33). In this situation, sons are likely to stay with their father and daughters are more likely to stay with their mother. The aim of marriage is the creation of a family is therefore defeated by divorce. He also argues that the implication of this tendency is that the father-child relationship assumes a greater emphasis in society than the mother-child relationship. According to this researcher, this implication is reinforced by the pattern of custody in the wake of divorce, where sons are likely to remain with their father and the daughters with their mother. Similarly, the effects of parental misjudgments descend heavily on the children. For this reason, divorce is harmful and challenges on the very notion of marriage. In ideal marriage, the training of children solely rests on the parents and should be performed jointly. However, in a divorced family, this cannot be the case, there by leaving numerous consequences upon children.

**(B). Insecurity:** It has also been found that children from divorced families do not feel secured. Joseph Jov confirmed this view that children of divorced parents are without adequate security. Unfortunately, these children carry these distorted feelings to married life; as a result, marital instability becomes hereditary, the family is the bedrock of any community and must be respected (Oral interview). Families are of paramount importance to the Nigerian society and Tiv in particular, because it is considered to be the basic unit of society. The

future of this country depends so much on successful parenting and marriages. Parents must therefore raise children according to prevailing societal norms and ways of life.

**(C). Poor/Inadequate Training and Education of Children:** Children in divorced families may not receive necessary and adequate training and education as required. He noted that children need both parents because each plays a complementary role in the children's life. The children of divorced parents often attempt to adjust and adapt to the new situation in which they find themselves; these children run the risk of discontinuity in their emotional and intellectual development. On the other hand, in a family where parents have decided to divorce each other, the children suffer. In most cases, the children of divorced families do not acquire adequate and sound life training. When they grow up, some of them may become societal detriments. The children of divorced parents may be morally defective, failing to fear neither God nor man. Hardon again observes that the immediate consequence of divorce is often a moral and social aberration. Many divorced offspring are lawless and irresponsible (6).

**(D). Lacks of Parental Love, Unity and Affection on the Family:** In a united home, the parent-child relationship takes a certain form. A child is a gift from the giver of life, God. As a result, parents are happy when their relationship produces a child and the child is an indication of their love. This helps them to establish a permanent bond of affection between parents and children. However, in a divorced family, unity is lacking, children lacks parental love and affection. This also affects the behavior of the children when they grow up. Their relationships to other people may be affected too. Since it is a joint responsibility of parents to train and discipline their children, they should be mindful enough to care for and love their children without limit. A relationship between a parent and child is reciprocal. As it is the duty of parents to provide for the needs of their children, so also are children's duty bound to look after their parents in their old age. But when the marriage bond is dissolved, this service will be lacking.

**(E). Psychological Effects:** It is not only the children that suffer the effects of divorce. It has been discovered that parents also suffer from the injury done by divorce. In the Tiv society, divorce is regarded as a stigma. It may be difficult for both husband and wife to cope from the emotional and psychological effects of divorce. Hardon again has observed that both husband and wife may be crushed by a sense of shame, fear and hatred. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to

live a secured and meaningful life. Sometimes, divorced parents may go to the extreme and seek an unfulfilling life through drinking and adultery. Women also suffer especially when divorce becomes inevitable. It is difficult for them to get financial support (8). A divorced wife may depend on relatives or be forced to lower her standard of living in a situation where the woman gets no job to support herself and her children. Again, the church never permits divorce and cannot allow it except on certain grounds.

**(F). Loss of membership:** As a result of divorce, strong members of the Church are now afraid of getting married, thus the Church suffers a shortfall of membership. In this regard, Tersee Kuhwa asserts that, certain members who were fervent, some are even leaders in their various denominations, are no more because of divorce (Oral Interview). It is therefore, true that, the loss of membership has actually promoted the proliferation of many denominations among Christianity because those who refuse discipline or excommunication result in leaving such churches for others; others change religion where they could be accommodated. Esther Anaana also posits that, divorce creates a number of problems for family members. Couples do find it uneasy to adjust to the new situation thus, there is loss of friendship, increase in domestic work load for the remaining partner especially in handing of children and redistribution of household task and responsibilities (Oral Interview). This is true in that, the possibility of finding School fees, clothing and so on becomes burdensome when left for one member. Collins concludes by saying, families who experience divorce suffers many things such as hopelessness, loneliness, confusion, and decline in family and spiritual growth.

### **Ways Of Preventing Divorce In The Society**

It is clear and more emphatic that the Church must make concrete policies and suggestions to reduce the present rate of divorce within the Christian community and the whole society at large, for divorce is unhealthy for the Christian faithful and these effects of divorce extend to all levels of human lives. The Church should therefore pay attention to the following principles which will help to guard against marriage and divorce. However, these are not the only ways to reduce and solve the problem of marriage and divorce among Christians. Other ways includes the following;

**(1). Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is another important method and quality that promotes Christian marriage. Marriage is ordained by God, sacred and indissoluble. Therefore, Christian's couples should be careful in their

relationship with one another, living must be based on forgiveness of one another. Although, marriage on earth will never be perfect; it still demands a continual effort toward perfection. God is the one that have ordained the institution of marriage and He is faithful to forgive us if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and Love covers all sins (Proverbs 10: 12). Forgiveness is needed in all Christian families. When the wife hurts the husband, she has to apologies to him and vice visa. It is also important that, couple should jointly endeavour to build a good and solid family life, husband and wife must exist as one and therefore, they must make this effort together. No partner should see himself or herself as a perfect partner in marriage. Every partner has weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. A true and mature Christian couple should learn how to forgive each other whole heartedly. Unless couples must learn how to forgive in their married life, if not, their relationship will suffer; the spirit of forgiveness is a virtue that is needed in the lives of all couples. Couples should also learn to accommodate each other's unique qualities. Peter emphasized the value of forgiveness when he asked the Lord, How often must I forgive him who sins against me? Seven times? (Matt. 18:21-22). Jesus immediately answered him and said, "No, not seven times, but I say, seventy times seven (Oforchukwu 240). This therefore means that, we need to forgive uncountable.

**(2). Maturity in Marriage:** Today, some Christian couples married at a tender age. Joseph Tsehamba attributed divorce to immaturity. Immaturity could make marriage a miserable union. This is because; young people do not understand the meaning of marriage before engaging into it, some feels it is just for pleasure (Oral Interview). Based on this, it would be better for Christians in Nigeria to marry when they have fully understood the true meaning and challenges of married life. The researcher therefore advocates twenty five years old and above as a mature age for marriage. The Church could refuse to wed couple who are below the age of twenty five years. Marriage requires maturity, for maturity will help our Christian marriages to grow and succeed.

**(3). Finances or Proper Financial Management:** The result of the study indicates that marital disagreements lead to divorce even in Christian families. According to Ajiki, finances are great indicators that have brought disagreements among the couple. To be on the safer side, both husband and wife should all work in order to keep the families stable. The Church should make full marriage classes and instructions compulsory for all couples. Marriage classes and instruction should be taught by the priests and other well experienced ministers thereby exposing couples to the effects of money in marriage. It will be good for couples

to keep a joint account to avoid cheating on one another (Oral Interview). The husband should be able to explain the nature of finance to the family members. It will be wise for Christian couples to plan their family budget in a week or monthly basis to avoid spending unnecessary. If these methods are adopted, it will help to safeguard Christian marriages in Nigeria and will be respected greatly.

**(4). Dialogue between Couples:** Divorce is unhealthy for family, children, husbands, wives, the Church, and indeed, every society. Because of this, it has become necessary for the Church and our Traditional society to do something quickly to reduce the increasing rate of divorce in the country today. The Church and Tiv society should set up a standard to guide married couple. It is believed that the Church has the power to resolve some of the problems that Tiv Traditional society and Christians face in their marriages and religious faith. Thus, dialogue between couples, Christian Church and the Traditional culture is important to appreciate marriage and avoid divorce among Christians. This will surely reduce the rate of divorce in our societies. Acknowledging the importance of dialogue in the society, Pope John Paul II called for the Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994. He tasked all Bishops to make a meaningful dialogue between Churches and Traditional societies in Africa for the rapid growth and expansion of the gospel across Africa (45). Metuh defined dialogue as a “frank discussion between two or more parties, aimed at reaching a better understanding of each other's point of view and working out a compromise acceptable to all sides” (441). In dialogue, all parties involved must respect the feelings and faiths of other parties. There is need for openness and prejudice must be reduced. He maintained dialogue seeks to eliminate every prejudice, intolerance and unnecessary misunderstanding.

**(5). Teaching and Counseling:** The church can help prevent divorce by teaching or counseling that divorce should not be considered by Christians as options for resolving their marital problems. If a Christian couple finds it intolerable to live together, they may choose to separate for a time or to file for legal separation. In such instances, the church must make it clear that the only two Scriptural options are (1) to remain single, or (2) to work toward a possible reconciliation. When confronted with the stark reality of choosing between remaining single or being reconciled, chances are that more couples will opt for the latter (Okplogidi Oral interview). Unfortunately, this Biblical teaching is seldom implemented. Most churches have come to accept, in practice if not in principle, divorce as a guiltless

and normal procedure. By so doing, they are facilitating rather than preventing marriage breakup or divorce.

**(6). Disciplinary Actions:** The church can help prevent divorce by taking disciplinary actions against spouses who choose to divorce. Such actions could involve placing the transgressors under censure for a time by not giving them leadership responsibilities. If during such a time there are no indications of repentance, the church should ex-communicate those people in order to express her abhorrence of such evil. Addressing a case of sexual immorality in the church of Corinth, Paul explicitly enjoins, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Cor. 5:2). Such an action is necessary in order for the church to uphold its high standard and to sound a clear warning to anyone contemplating divorce. When Church members know that their church does not condone but resolutely condemns any unbiblical divorce by punishing them with censure or even ex-communication, they will be less prone to consider divorce as a way out of their marital problems. What encourages many Christians to divorce is the social acceptance of such practices both outside and inside their own church.

### **Conclusion And Recommendations**

Originally, marriage is an institution that was ordained by God right from creation for an ultimate intended purpose. This work presupposes that, there are many cases of divorce in Christianity today and many factors account for a marriage to end in divorce. Some of such factors includes: Childlessness, wrong choice of marriage partner, adultery and quarreling, polygamy, alcoholism, poor financial management, change in social-economic structure, psychological factor, poor orientation, witchcrafts and mystical powers, adoption of no fault divorce and so on. These problems are affecting the development and progress of Christianity in many parts of Nigeria and the general society. One of such problems is that children who come from divorce families seem to find life difficult and uneasy and the society at large is affected. It is against this background that the researcher is concerned about the alarming rate of divorce cases among Christian's families in Nigeria today thereby according the following recommendations.

**(1).** It is point also to note that the marriage contract is for life. The man or the woman is obliged to keep his or her marriage bond intact. There is a clear understanding that Christianity is different from other religious stands on marriage and divorce. Christians are encouraged not to take tradition or cultural values above the Bible as others have done. Christians must however, not allow



the extremes of radicalism or liberalism to impede their progress in understanding and applying what the Bible teaches on the subject of divorce which affect so many lives. The Bible must be considered as the main authority on marriage and divorce and therefore follow the teachings of the Bible accordingly. Also, Culture as part of the people must be extensively investigated to address its negative influence on marriage which in turn results to divorce. Therefore, there should be special laws set on ground prohibiting divorce in all places both to Christians and to all Traditional societies.

(2). It should be noted that, the abolishment of *yamshe* (exchange marriage) was not actually for hatred but biblical. Many only looked at this in a cultural perspective. This work therefore enables the society to comprehend that Christianity is based on Christ teaching and not actually traditional values. Cultural values that violate New Testament ethics are denounced without any apology, where the two conflicts, the message of Christ on such issue supersede.

(3). It should also be comprehended that, God created not just individual person in his own image and likeness, but made them male and female to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, hence, marriage and family are intrinsic to human and must not be tempered with in the name of divorce for whatever reasons.

(4). It should be noted that money is one of the motivating force in every marriage that if not well handles, could separates couples, for it has incredible power. Couples must be careful with money otherwise, money will hold the sole power to either unify or divide the couple. Money may arouse contempt in the family. Peterson argues that money, like fire, can be a faithful servant but a tyrannical master. We must either master our money or be forever intimidated and dominated by it in such a way that making peace with money is not easy

(5). No one should be allowed to get married without premarital counseling. Married couple should also be taught from time to time about cultural values since there is no culture that is perfect. The church should teach, preach and live faithfully. It must begin from the top; Pastors should set the standard to its members. They should be role models to their members and members be compared to live faithfully at all times both married and unmarried ones.

(6). The role of forgiveness is extremely important in married life. Couples must forgive one another in order to promote the institution of marriage. Ultimately, this study concludes that marriage is sacred and indivisible, and

there are numerous steps that couples must take in order to ensure that what God has joined together, let no man separate.

(7). The time has come for the Christian leaders to re-evaluate its teaching on divorce. It is a fact to note that love should be adopted by marriage partners because it has the ability to strengthen and unite all Christian families irrespective of their background. When love, peace, and joy prevail in our Churches, divorce will be reduced to the beeriest minimum.

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