

## Divorce in the Church of God in Nigeria: Causes and Possible Solutions

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### Abstract

*This paper x-rays the effects of divorce in the Church with a bid to identifies the positives and negative influence on the Church, which is expected to be the community of faith. Arguably, divorce has become a factor that has a direct effect on the Church as it threatening the marriage institution the block on which the church hinges. Hence there is the need for a proper understanding of the causes, effects and possible way out to avoid this cankerworm within the body of Christ especially in the African Christian context most notably with the pronouncement of what God has joined together no one should put asunder as well as the saying till death do us path.*

**Keywords:** divorce, causes, solutions, church.

### Introduction

Divorce is the dissolution of the contracted marriage between two persons. It is also the separation and end of marriage for a couple. As rightly captured by Michael R. Spradlin, divorce is the breaking of the marriage covenant. "It is an action contrary to the pattern of one man, one woman, and one lifetime." The root idea implied a cutting of the marriage bond. Consequently, divorce put an abrupt end to an officially consummated marriage legally and officially. Hence, divorce is the separation and end of marriage for a couple irrespective of the number of years they have lived together. What put an end to the marriage between the husband and wife is divorce. However, the family commonwealth ties go beyond the two persons at the centre. It often compromises solutions to stock and not legal spouses, collapsing the structure of family life, marriage, and cut off communication disorder; parents with children have been defined in line with divorce. In fact, as the link between law and social and formal contracts are established. If the parties are unable, for various reasons, according to the rules and regulations, they had to be separated. This family is like building a couple of columns that make up each column, and collapse in strength and stability of the building will suffer instability and rupture (Shahram, 2012).

Divorce with this perspective is one of the worst social phenomena, pillars of the family in more cluttered, and its destructive effects on the children will leave behind. Divorce, break, collapse and destruction of the centre are warm and peaceful life that irreparable effects on family leave. Divorce act after that leaves the family and society, including the church of God dysfunction during and after the divorce. It reduces the level of confidence for one and other within and outside the family as much as causing one or both of the marriage partners significant feelings of emptiness. Divorce is the tearing apart of the foundation of all stable societies – the family.

**Church** – Church is the assemblage of the called-out ones from the World into the kingdom of God, although still living in the World. Church, therefore, has nature, which makes it distinct from the World. All creatures that have been effectually called out of prediction into the Holiness of Godhead constitute a part of God's family, Presence, Organ, Instrument, and Reality in creation (Malomo, 2004). The Church is a group of "called out" ones; the makeup of this is the missionary persons that consequently serve as God's ambassadors on earth (Elaturoti, 2004). These groups of people are a partaker of divine nature, which makes them distinct from the World. Unfortunately, this nature was not clearly understood by society and even by many individuals who claimed to be part of the Church. They are redeeming, sanctifying, and regenerating family, group, and body (Malomo, 2004). Church members are the body of Christ partaking of the same sacramental baptism rites and expected to pursue all that makes for that life of completeness, fulfilment, and perfect harmony of God. The truth, however, is that the expected qualities and nature listed above were for human beings living in this part of the mortality terrain, and the qualities are rarely pursuit as a result of human frivolities and limitations.

Within this holy estate of God is, therefore, the threatening instance of divorce, amongst other challenging issues. Consequently, divorce bothers the peaceful living of the Church as living organs. Life after divorce usually takes on a whole new feeling and meaning. Although divorce is not the end, it is a new chapter, and even many intending couples, as well as the family and relations, do not think divorce would happen. Life after divorce will be what one makes of it and the ability not to settle for surviving when one can thrive (David, 2017). It is, however, a heart-breaking thing to have friends and family members who are going through a divorce. Whoever is going through a strained relationship may find the stress and emotional anguish challenging to bear, which consequently necessitate divorce. There are long-lasting and far-reaching effects that need to be considered before making life-changing decisions. However, one's ability to think clearly and rationally about the future is often clouded by the emotional trauma that may be unbearable as it is experiencing.

### **Causes of Divorce**

Amongst several other causes, this paper seeks to identify the following causes of divorce as it relates to the Church.

1. The wrong choice of Spouse- Many whose Marriage is threatened, and the latter resulted in divorce is the wrong choice of a spouse. At the point of searching for whom to marry or the period of dating many.
2. Too short period of courtship- Many individuals that rush into Marriage without the needful knowledge of one another, as well as all they are supposed to know about Marriage, are prone to divorce. Some individuals who have escaped the trauma encountered in the Marriage if they have an exact time of courtship together wherein they would have been exposed to their partners' strengths and weaknesses and probably quit or stayed in the relationship as the case may be.
3. Religious differences or imbalance- there are many doctrinal differences and views even within the same religions, and this often brings unending disagreement in the family. These spiritual imbalances' and differences frequently threaten the harmony of many couples as they were brought up and trained in different doctrinal points of view.
4. Lack of God's guidance before Marriage- Many of the present-day youth get into the marriage institutions basically on what they see and their limited understanding thinking they would be able to cope and handle whatever comes to their ways in the institution (Nnanna, 2014).
5. Financial challenge- Unable to meet the financial needs of the family often leads to separation or divorce. Often time mismanagement of funds as well as the different financial status of the couple also plays a vital role in the stability or otherwise of the Marriage
6. Background upbringing of the couple- the couple's different phenomenological background ranging from social status, educational, exposure, financial, amongst others tells a lot on the falling or stability of Marriage.
7. Inability to adjust- many couples are not wise in dealing with adaptability and adjustment in the course of Marriage. Some individuals would think they would change the other persons to their standard while this is not achieved; it becomes an issue which often threatens the marriage institutions. Lack of adjustment hence leads many offended parties to back off in the said union.
8. Communication problem- lack of effective communication among the couple is also a factor in the separation fuss. The present professional and economic instability, as well as job security in the country, tends to suggest to many couples to live apart, which latter tells on their Marriage. Distance and lack of effective communication has resulted in many divorces as the trust is not properly built or often questioned.

### **Effects of Divorce**

The separation of the couple leaves the children or a child an indelible print that remains a social norm and stigma for years. To Brian (2011), Divorce is associated with increased risk for numerous psychological,

academic and social problems throughout the life-course. Experiencing parental separation is associated with roughly a two-fold increase in problems on average, but an overwhelming majority of children and adolescents do not exhibit impairing problems after parental separations. In other words, recent research highlights an increased risk for adverse outcomes, but parental divorce separation does not necessarily doom a child to have significant, impairing problems. He further informed that the children and adolescents who experience parental divorce, stand the risk of frequent and significant emotional distress during the separation and afterwards. In additions, he submitted that much recent research that uses numerous designs to test the underlying causal mechanisms suggests that the increased risk for impairing problems is not due solely to selection factors (risks that increase both parental separation and problems in the offspring). The ongoing conflicts between the co-parents after the separation, problems with poor parenting, financial difficulties resulting from the separation and loss of contact with the non-residential parent help explain the effects better.

Divorce damages society, it consumes social and human capital as well as substantially increases the cost to the taxpayer, while diminishing the taxpaying portion of society. It diminishes children's future competences in all five of society's significant tasks or institutions: family, school, religion, marketplace and government (Patrick, 2017). The reversal of the cultural and social status of divorce would be nothing less than a cultural revolution. Divorce also permanently weakens the family and the relationship between children and parents. It frequently leads to destructive conflict management methods, diminished social competence and for children, the early loss of Virginity, as well as diminished sense of masculinity or femininity for young adults. It also results in more trouble with dating, more cohabitation, and a greater likelihood of divorce, and higher expectations of divorce later in life (Patrick, 2017).

Besides the effects mentioned above, divorce detrimentally impacts individuals and society in numerous other ways which include but not limited to:

### **Negative Effect of Divorce**

1. Religious practice: Divorce diminishes the frequency of worship of God and Recourse to Him in prayer.
2. The frustration of the divorced couple which leads to disappointment and sometimes a withdrawal from the Church. This consequently affects the numerical strength of the Church and in an extension would have a direct effect on the financial strength of the affected Church.
3. Education: Divorce diminishes children's learning capacity and educational attainment.
4. The marketplace: Divorce reduces household income and deeply cuts individual earning capacity.
5. Government: Divorce significantly increases crime, abuse and neglect, drug use, and the costs of compensating government services.
6. Health and well-being: Divorce weakens children's health and longevity. It also increases behavioural, emotional, and psychiatric risks, including even suicide.
7. The parent's loss: The divorce process often brings lost contact with one of their parents. This loss is accompanied by a loss of knowledge, skills, and resources (financial, emotional) of the parent.
8. Economic loss: Another result of the divorce is that children living in single-parent families usually do not have the same resources as children in regular families.
9. Stress: The divorce process is accompanied by many changes in the daily life of children, like changing schools, child care, the home place, etc. Children must also adapt to changes in relationships with friends and extended family. These changes create a more stressful environment for children.
10. 10. Reduced parental adaptation: Coping of children in families depend on the mental mode of parents and this is also true in families who have experienced a divorce.

11. The lack of ability or compliance (competence) of the parents: Much of what happens to children is influenced by the parents' skills to help them develop. The competence of the parents after divorce has a significant impact on children.

12. Exposure to conflict between parents: This conflict exists in every family, especially in families who have experienced a divorce. The level of conflict to which children are exposed has a fatal impact on the well-being of children (Haimi, 2016).

### **Positive Effects of Divorce**

As there are negative impacts of nearly everything as well as good, divorce also has a positive impact to an extent. This includes the opportunity to start over again for the affected parties.

1. Divorce puts an end to continuous quarrels and bickering and unending quarrels. Once there is the dissolution of Marriage, the aggrieved persons would then be relieved of the pain of quarrels and fighting.

2. Some couples who find it difficult to conceive or bear children often find the fulfilment of their dream child(ren) after divorce. This may be a result of genotype incompatibility or some other reasons, both medically and non-medical. Arguably, divorce gives them a new lease of hope for their marital fulfilment.

3. There is relative peace in the society after some couple gets a divorce as this puts an end to unending fighting, quarrelling and other domestic abuses.

4. Divorce often checks untimely death of the couple as this may allow either party to have a peace of mind and even prevent untimely or unmatched death.

5. From its literal meaning, divorce releases according to Shahram (2012), the couple from the bond(age) of the covenantal relationship, which was sworn at their Marriage, which consequently allows freedom of choice and lives for the party.

6. Some individuals find fulfilment and coital excitement in the next Marriage, which they may not be having or enjoying in the former Marriage.

### **Some Helpful tips to Avoid Divorce in the Church**

In a bid to avoid the horror of divorce in the Church among the Christian couple that may be considering a divorce, Peach (2017), gave the following tips that could be of help to salvage a dying marriage. The tips' centre is around what ought to be known as a choice made would have long-lasting and far-reaching effects not only on the couple but including their children if there is any as well as the Church as a whole.

1. Prayer- Peach David posited that for a Christian irrespective of the assault and pain of heart and emotions that may warrant a divorce, Christians should endeavour to pray to their heavenly Father. Pray that God will give you wisdom in your relationship (James 1:5). Pray for your spouse. Pray that God will give you love for him or her again (1 Corinthians 13). It is good to pray for one's partner at this juncture, yet it is best to spend more time praying that God will change you and make your relationship with your spouse stronger and better. As a result of building a better relationship with God, you will invariably build a better relationship with your mate.

2. Remember- There is the need to reflect on the journey so far of the relationship and call to remembrance brought by the partner together the years ago that you embarked on the marital relationship when the two said "I do", the big attraction to him or her then should not be forgotten and even jettisoned. The very thing that motivated the two to start dating at the first instance should be recalled. Those qualities are probably still there, which may have been unnoticed, which have to be looked for. He or she may have changed since those innocent days. Why? Is it because you have changed in such a way that you no longer bring out those qualities in your spouse? Maybe you had nagged them so much to change through the years that when they finally did, you buried that quality you fell in love with. Try to remember those early days when you first fell in love. If you built your relationship on the right things, then those qualities are still

inside your spouse. He, however, posited that a relationship that was built purely on a physical attraction needs to be cautioned as the body shape could not remain unchanged; hence jumping from a relationship to another would repeat itself. Jumping out of one relationship to find another physically attractive person will end the same way. Find, or bring out again, the qualities in your spouse that you loved so much (David, 2017).

3. Be the kind of person you want to live with – While seeking to change your partner, be a model by behaving the same way as well as treating your spouse the same way you want him/her to behave and treat you. Consider deeply how you are acting towards your spouse? If he or she acted like you are acting towards them, would you want to be married to them? You should model the type of behaviour you expect. Act properly toward your spouse and your entire household. Do not look at what your spouse's responsibility is; focus on what you are to do. Men become the husband that loves in such a way that your wife wants to submit and reverence you. Ladies, become the wife that makes it easy for your husband to love because you are living in obedience to the commands of God (David, 2017).

4. Communicate- The communication gap is one of the loopholes responsible for the divorce. Do not allow the gap to continue to be widened. Do you remember when you communicated with one another and did not yell? Was there any time you enjoyed communicating with your spouse, there was a time that you did; otherwise, you would not have gotten married. As a dating couple, you looked forward to the time to be probably off work that you could be alone with the one you loved. Your friend and partner, whom you vowed you would never abandon, got ditched as soon as your spouse came into your life. You found ways to be together so you could talk even when you did not have time in your busy schedule. Remember, it takes two people to argue. If you just admit, you are sorry for the way you have been acting you could diffuse some of the tension. There is no reason for you to pretend the sinful actions of your spouse do not exist; however, you can admit your pride and faults. You may find that your arguments will cease as soon as you take the time to tell them you are sorry (David, 2017).

5. Attack the problem together and separate issues from personality. Do not try to win an argument just to have another notch in the belt. They can both win if they will try and solve the problem together and stop trying to have a better argument than the other person.

6. Live a life pleasing unto the Lord. Your relationship with God should be your first priority. I know this goes hand in hand with the first point about praying, but this is so critical. Let God be the centre of your life as God is a witness of your Marriage, let him continually journey with you live and home, and in so doing, you would be able to weather the storm of life. When God is first in your life, He will help you work out your other priorities. Live a life that is pleasing to Him, and He will help clear up your emotion-filled mind so that you can see things from a higher perspective. If you are in tune with the Lord and your spouse is in tune with the Lord, then you will be in tune with one another. Just because people are Christians does not mean they will never disagree with one another. However, if they will both live in agreement and obedience to the Lord, then they will be in agreement with each other. The Jesus in you will not fight with Jesus in your spouse. He further counsels that the marital challenge and crises should be seen as a spiritual issue. One may see anger over one's spouse as a necessity which needs personal effort and interventions hence; this would lead the concerned person to do contrary as the anger aggravates, however, seeing it from spiritual angle may aid one to present the challenges before God as a spiritual battle to be fought together (David, 2017).

The Church must recognize and teach that Marriage is grounded not in feelings of love but in the practice of love. Nor is the marriage bond contingent upon self-gratification or personal fulfilment. The Church has swallowed a great quantity of pop psychology that has no foundation in the biblical depiction of Marriage. When the marital union is rightly understood as a *covenant*, the question of divorce assumes a very different aspect. Those who have made Promises before God should trust God for grace sufficient to keep those promises, and they should expect the community of faith to help them to keep the faith, by supporting them and holding them accountable.

Although scholars' opinions differ, Amy Desai submitted that there might be cases in which the Bible allows divorce and/or remarriage. For those who are concerned about whether there are biblical grounds for divorce, people generally would counsel that such persons would need to commit the matter to prayer and study. In addition, they would need to seek out counsel from one's pastor and, ideally, a licensed Christian counsellor. The question of sin cannot be taken lightly. But biblical grounds may exist (Amy, 2017):

1. When one's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent and live faithfully with the marriage partner, Jesus' words in Matthew 19:8-9 indicate that divorce in this circumstance is acceptable. However, looking closely at this presage would give the full picture that Jesus does not approve it but took the enquirer back to the original context of Marriage by telling them that it was not so.

2. When one spouse is not a Christian, and that spouse wilfully and permanently deserts the Christian spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15).

To James Dobson however, the position is that divorce and remarriage appear to be justified in Scripture only in a few instances. He posited that for a follower of Jesus Christ, a careful prayer on such decision to divorce is pertinent and necessary, also to be open to God's leading as God's heart is to heal marriages. But if one's spouse is deciding on divorce, one may not be able to stop him or her through current divorce laws. However, one can try to persuade the partner to consider a legal separation first, which would give both parties more time to consider the issue (Dobson, 2017).

### Conclusion

The majority of evangelicals and the contemporary African Christians believe that Jesus permits divorce basically on the ground of marital unfaithfulness as William Heth (1997) posited hence, allows remarriage for the affected persons as recorded in the gospel (Matt 5:32; 19:9) and that Paul sanctions remarriage when Christian spouses are abandoned by unbelieving mates consequently recognizes divorce as an option (1 Cor 7:15). The many individuals seeking divorce today more often than nought have someone in mind to be married to after divorce; this implies that the majority of the divorce cases are usually not plain cases. The author argues to the contrary that even though marital separation or legal divorce may be advisable under some circumstances (persistent adultery, physical or verbal abuse, incest, etc.), Jesus taught that his disciples should not remarry after a divorce. In short, remarriage after divorce for whatever reason – even sexual immorality (Matt 5:32; 19:9) – was a violation of the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14 Deut 5:18). Jesus may, although it seems to give room for divorce, there is no room for remarriage after divorce. It may suffice at this juncture to submit that God's standard cannot be compromised for the worldly standard. Although the legal law and standard may permit divorce, Christians, who are then regarded as Church though living in the World, should see and know themselves as God's ambassadors on earth who should be a godly model for the World to see and emulate.

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