

- AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF MATTHEW 19:1-6 AND ITS RELEVANCE
TO HARMONIOUS FAMILY LIVING IN AN AFRICAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes to present a critical examination of marriage according to Matthew 19:1-6. It argues the need for the African society, most especially in Christian families, to pursue a deeper, fuller concept of marriage. It also emphasizes that, biblical balanced understanding of marriage is necessary and helpful for the personal and corporate well being of the African society.

The biblical overview of the concept of marriage in the Old and New Testaments, exegesis of the text of Matthew 19:1-6 and its application for today's African society are laid bare in this study. Chapter one deals with the introductory aspects: how the work is to be done and its scope, the second chapter centered on the literature review of what the Old and New Testaments teach about marriage, and the African perspectives about marriage. Attempt was made in the third chapter to exegete the passage by translating the pericope from the Greek text to English and did the exegetical work of the passage.

It was seen that marriage has its beginning from the time of creation, and that it was God who instituted it. It was also revealed that, it is God who brings the right man to the right woman and does the joining. It was instituted for a man and a woman. Hence, God sanctioned monogamy and makes the union to be indissoluble. Chapter four consists of the applications of Matthew 19:1-6 to an African society. The writer looked at the situation of marriage in Africa, the plan and purposes of God for marriage, the relationship of husband and wife, and in their community. The summary of the work, conclusion, and recommendations formed chapter five. It is hoped that readers will find the content of this work not only significant from an academic perspective, but personally relevant to foster harmonious living in our homes and in the community.

5.2. CONCLUSION

Thus far, this essay has disclosed that marriage emanated from the heart of God, and was instituted only for a man and a woman legally bound together throughout their lives. It is profitable for procreation of new life, sexual fulfillment and companionship. It is a sacrament between two equals with different functions. This union is the most honourable among the union created by God; its relationship is potentially the most rewarding of human relationship. Yet, it is the most complicated relationship. It involves bringing together a man and a woman of different backgrounds, establishing new relationship with relatives and friends, and pulling into focus different values and priorities. This is not an easy relationship, but obedient to God's leading in making choice, constant meditation in the word of God, understanding and living out the biblical concept of marriage makes it easier.

This union is a love partnership designed and created by God between husband and wife. Only God's presence in that relationship can make it what it ought to be. God can be in the midst of such partnership, only when the couple individually accepts the divine saving power of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. Only as God is put first in every fashion of life can He mold the home to fit His will and purpose.

Therefore, it is not the will of God that home should break. It is important to note that God who established the institution can never be a party to its destruction. The Bible says, "What God had joined together, let no man divide" (Matthew 19:6). Thus, Jesus' ideal on marriage is one man and one woman together for life not for a

period but for life Jesus' teaching on marriage needs to be emulated as it reflects the original intention of God's ideal marriage.

However, being exposed to sound biblical teaching on marriage does not automatically solve problems on marriage. Happiness comes by applying what you hear and obey it, thereby learning how to handle those inevitable conflicts in marriage. God is the initiator and sustainer of marriage. Therefore, to achieve quality, healthy, and harmonious living; faith in God is unavoidable. This is not only as a foundation upon which to build a mature and happy home, but also as a daily source of strength that makes possible an exciting, rewarding, good life together in the family.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having gone through this exegetical work, the writer thus has the following recommendations for Africans who want to experience harmony, and be fulfilled in marriage. And also for those who want the purpose of God for their existence to come to reality;

Pastors must constantly seek to rediscover and grasp the biblical understanding of marriage. It should be well taught from time to time in our churches. This will help people to have prior knowledge of marriage before entering into it. Constant teachings on marriage will also help the young ones to know the impending danger in choosing by sight.

Also for the sake of church members who have not known Christ, nor have the understanding of what marriage entails as at the time they got wedded, but latter comes to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, Pastors should plan adequate programme e.g. family enrichments programme, couples fellowship etc, through which these set of people will be educated; making them to know that though they did

it ignorantly, they are still acceptable before God. Thus, teaching them original concept of marriage will make them to know God's expectation over their families.

The young ones who are thinking about marriage partner should endeavour to seek the face of God in prayer, and patience enough to hear God speaking to them before making the choice. Though, parental guidance is necessary (most especially where the parents are Christians) but not to be enforced on them, rather they should allow the leading of God to take priority.

For two people of different parental background and perhaps different cultural background to understand each other and live together happily, it is expected of the couples to have adequate knowledge of cultural background of their spouse; also they should open their hearts and lives to each other, they should be prayerful for divine assistance in all areas of life. He brought them together, and He is able to see them through. They should determine to abide prayerfully with what the Bible say about their gender – role, and heritage of God's promise concerning marriage.

Since having lasting union depends on the ability of the couples to leave and unite, it is therefore, expected of the couples to be able to sit together and solve whatever differences they may have amicably. Also, as they learn to unite, there should be an expression of love, friendship and respect for one another. They should give priority to their union with their spouse above any thing in life (Amos 3:3; Mal. 2:14-16).

It is advisable for the in-laws to avoid unnecessary visitation so as to afford the couples the needed privacy to build their family. They should see their son-in-law as their son and daughter-in-law as their daughter, and ready to accept responsibility to be praying and do everything within their capability for the success of their son and daughter-in-law.

To derive benefits from marriage, the couple must know themselves and those who surround them (Akinsola 87). This is necessary for them to love, understand, help and encourage themselves, and be channels of blessing to their community. Therefore, they should be willing to invest time, attention and also make conscious effort to build bridges across the habits that divide them and others.