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CAUSES OF BROKEN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

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ABSTRACT

God established marriage as an institution to unite a man and a woman together in an ever *joyous and happy relationship*. The union is supposed to be fulfilling and life-long. Unfortunately, this is not the case in reality. A general observation shows that many Christian marriages are far from being blissful. Some end up in court seeking separation, divorce or outright annulment. Still, many marriages that are not in these categories are plagued with hurt, pain, bitterness, despair and frustration. Some of our churches are even headed by divorced pastors. Marriages do not have to be this way.

The concern to make marriage what God intends it to be is the motivation for this study. The purpose is to examine the married life in order to find out what the unsuccessful marriages are doing wrong and what the successful ones are doing right. When the two are examined side by side it will be possible to readily identify the pitfall and take steps to avoid them. It is clear that any situation that allows a divorced pastor to head a local church cannot be allowed to continue in the interest of the Christian truth.

In order to identify the major causes of broken Christian marriage questionnaires were designed with particular attention focused on three major areas of marital relationships. These are: husband-wife relationship, such as sex and finance; husband-wife relationships and others: consisting of the role of in-laws, the place of members of the extended families, the influence of friends and the potential danger of female house-helpers and the general attitude of the couple concerned.

In addition to the analysis of the questionnaires, extensive review of previous work on the subject was undertaken. This includes books, research papers, and literatures. Other sources of information are interviews, and opinions expressed during 'family forum' – a programme of Shepherd Hill Baptist Church aimed at improving marital relationships.

CONCLUSION

The task of this study is to determine the “Causes of Broken Christian Home.” Its primary aim is to prevent broken homes, while its secondary concern is for couples to enjoy that abundance of living promised by the Lord Jesus Christ even in marriage. The research shows that at the root of every conflict in Christian marriage is disobedience to Biblical guidelines on interpersonal relationship in general and lack of application to live out Christian faith in marital life in particular. It is the refusal or the unwillingness to submit oneself to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that marks the difference between success or failure in marriage.. In this regard, such Biblical guidelines to note include but not limited to (1) the admonition to live in peace . . . (Rom. 12:18; 14:19, 2 Cor. 13:11, 1 Thess. 13:14). (2) to seek peace and pursue it . . . (1 Pet. 3:11). (3) to regard others better than oneself . . . (Phil 2:3). (4) To love one’s neighbour . . . (Matt. 19:19). (5) the challenge that whatever we do, “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

With particular reference to marriage the refusal or unwillingness to live out the marriage vows by one or both partners leads to the pain and hurt experienced in marital relationships. It may very often also lead to broken Christian homes. Couples must keep their marital vows. God intends marriage to be blissful. It can never be unless or until couples learn or determine to keep these vows. (1) “. . . till death do us part . . .” means that divorce, separation or annulment are not options. When couples step into their new life of union with this conviction; it becomes necessary for both parties to make whatever adjustment is necessary to achieve that level in

their relationship that brings peace, solidify their friendship and promote growth and intimacy in their love life. (2) “. . . all my worldly goods I thee endow” means no material possession is owned by one party to the exclusion of the other. It is an undertaken to share it all in a life of equal partnership. Therefore, there is no room for stinginess on the part of one partner to the other. (3) “. . . that the man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh” implies that marriage relationship is placed over and above the attachment between parents and their children, which is the highest form of attachment. Therefore, there can be no further special people in the lives of either the husband or the wife that should be put above their marriage. This exclusive relationship demands loyalty, purity and openness, while conferring equality in conjugal rights on the couple. The principle of one flesh demands a life of unity, a life of constant consultation with each other, a life that does not only compliment each other but is made complete in the other. For these reasons the more interests the couple share in common, the more quality times they will spend together and the less friction will occur between them.

What marriage demands are divine attributes which Paul says war against natural inclinations. These divine attributes must be sought through ceaseless prayers offered with sincere hearts and genuine intentions. It is this spiritual development that make it mandatory to forgive readily and willingly whatever wrong the partner commits. This spiritual growth culminates in true love of self-sacrifice and self-giving.

The three major areas that form the backbone of potential conflict among couples have been identified as attitude towards money, attitude towards sexual

intercourse and the special people in the lives of the couples whom they place over and above the marriage. On sexual intercourse the Bible emphasised that nothing is to come between the couples on their readiness and willingness to satisfy each other; not even communion with God in prayers, except by prior mutual agreement of the couple. For this reason the ownership of the partner's body is vested in the other (1 Cor 7:3-5). As a result of disobedience however, sex is used not as act to cement the union but rather to strain or break up the relationship.

For Christians, love is the foundation of all deeds, be it interpersonal or intra personal, all relationships are motivated by love. Once this rule is violated conflicts will occur. This study proves conclusively that if a Christian follows implicitly the Biblical guidelines on marriage, he or she could marry even "the devil incarnate" and make a success of the marriage. This feat is achievable because Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments.¹⁰⁶ However the Christian gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit that is able to transform them, does so only to the extent they surrender themselves.

Summary of Findings

To give another summary of findings here may amount to repeating the explanatory notes to the interpretation of the tables in the previous chapter. However, one major finding not expected is the value of the research itself. The results showed that it is possible, in spite of the reluctance as well as the unwillingness to participate in the exercise because of its personal nature, to induce people to talk about

¹⁰⁶ Francis Wale Oke, Walking in Love, (Ibadan: Victory Literature Crusade, 1992), p. 18,

Recommendations

These recommendations are put forth based on the research findings:

¹⁰⁷ G. V. Hamilton, *A Research in Marriage*, (New York: Medical Research Press, 1979), p. 531

1. The Church ought to organise pre-marital counseling and family counseling as an integral part of its teaching ministry.
2. Marriage, the family and the Christian home should be a focus of serious and of systematic teaching of the Church through all age groups.
3. Seminars and group discussions on marriage and the family should be encouraged among families young and old.
4. The basic concept of Christian values in marriage: monogamy, the permanence and indissolubility of marriage, the principle of one flesh and the significance of marital vows, among others, should be taught from sunbeam to adult class as currently practiced in the Sunday School.

The sure way to success in marriage is obedience to the word of God in thought and in deed.

Areas of Further Research

What is needed is further research on how to prevent divorce and how to promote more enlightenment that will lead to blissful marriage in Christian homes.