

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DIVORCE  
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT  
AND THE TEACHINGS  
OF JESUS**

NBTS  
Fa 26-c  
MATS

**Being Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of  
The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary  
Ogbomoso, Nigeria**

**In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Award of the Degree  
Master of Arts in Theological Studies  
(M.A.T.S.)**

**by  
Simon Ayodeji Fasoro  
June, 2003**

07 - 0068

## CONCLUSION

"Divorce is an experience which is in important respects more difficult emotionally than bereavement through death."<sup>1</sup> Therefore the Church and the community need to be more concerned about the stability of marriage.

The Church is nowadays scheduled with more responsibilities of deciding on what to do about the common occurrence of divorce. The Christian community should also try to learn from the sayings and doings of Jesus and other biblical writers. The Church must take these teachings and find a way of applying what had been said to her own contemporary case.

Paul followed the principles of Christ on divorce, he adapted the principles to the conditions at Corinth. "He speaks of a woman divorcing her husband, and by his own authority allows divorce in mixed marriages. Seeing the end time in view, he does not consider important the possibility of remarriage. He gives this teaching to answer certain problems that had arisen in the church."<sup>2</sup> Mark also considered the Gentile circumstances by seeing that the principles of Jesus apply to the woman as well as to the man. By this he gave an ethical teaching of Jesus to the disciples (Mark 10:10-12).

Matthew, the writer of the first gospel, was also concerned about the

---

<sup>1</sup>Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology, ed. by Ralph G. Turnbull, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup>Donald W. Shaner, A Christian View of Divorce (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 94.

ethical conduct of Jewish-Christians. The phrase "except for unchastity" makes this teaching correspond with the Jewish concept of law and without doubt gives an illustration of a problem which was in the Palestinian Church.<sup>3</sup> The ethical aspect of life in any environment must be well considered before a logical conclusion could be reached on any problem.

The system of government of a denomination, the prevailing condition around it, and her acceptable ethical conduct determine what a church says on divorce. Each denomination however seems to have a biblical base to justify her action. The extent to which a denomination speaks on divorce depends upon its system of government. While some (with Episcopalian polity) can make policies which must be followed by all her ministers and members, other(s) (with congregational system) make suggestions and recommendations in such a way that freedom is allowed in the area of interpretation and carrying out the order. There are also others (Presbyterians) who combine hierarchy and individual freedom to make a decision. The Church at large, not minding the group nor the denomination, must come to a point where they will recognize both the evil and the possibility of divorce. Modern culture may create new problems that have adequate reasons for divorce, but no problem, however serious, should the church allow to break a marriage relationship. The Church must apply the biblical principles on divorce and apply them to meet man's unique needs in the modern society.

---

<sup>3</sup>Shaner, citing Gunther Bornkamm, "Die Stellung des Neuen Testaments zur Ehescheidung: Ein Gutachten," Evangelische Theologie.



The modern society is interested in divorcing on the grounds of (1) childlessness; (2) in-laws problems; (3) incompatibility of tempers; (4) inability to dress well; (5) non-availability of money; (6) unexpectedly sustained injury that takes off the former beauty and for many other reasons that are not biblical. The church has more responsibility to get involved in pre- and post-marital counselling in order to stop or reduce divorce and the increasing problems that come from broken homes.

Where adultery has caused divorce, the Book of Hosea must be a source of inspiration. Hosea, despite the sins of his wife Gomer, took her back with love and forgiveness just as God, despite the sins of his people Israel, calls them back with kindness and mercy: "Go, again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods . . ."(Hosea 3:1). It is clear beyond doubt that unfaithfulness in marriage brings the marriage under a great stress, betrays the marriage and undermines it, but it does not automatically destroy the marriage. Marriage relationships must be established with forgiveness as the guilty party repents. It is hard to forgive, but God demands it because he forgives us and requires that we live together till death parts us.

Divorce takes place because of many other reasons apart from adultery. Frequently and easily, childlessness, sickness or unfaithfulness are given as reasons for divorce. If both partners will learn to forgive and accept each other. In all circumstances, there will definitely be opportunity to give a beautiful testimony.

Counselling broken families is not an easy task, but every Christian counsellor must try to heal broken relationships. In the opinion of Haselbarth, after much trial to counsel divorcees might have failed, divorce "must be granted where a marriage is destroyed beyond healing so that its continuance would not bring more harm to all who are concerned – again especially to the children."<sup>4</sup>

Cornes in his own submission will not support divorce. It is true that the Roman law demands that a husband can divorce his adulterous wife; the Jewish law also had this requirement. The requirement of the Mosaic law is even greater because adultery is punishable by death (Leviticus 20:10). Sexual infidelity is widespread today, but adultery does not of itself 'destroy' the marriage; it ought not to break the marriage bond. It is clear beyond doubt that unfaithfulness in marriage brings the marriage under a great stress, betrays the marriage and undermines it, but it does not automatically destroy the marriage.<sup>5</sup>

If God's mind is that there should be no divorce, then a serious question is raised on whether it will be right for ministers and counsellors to keep or advise couples whose marriage(s) seem unmendable to stay together. Barclay has this to say:<sup>6</sup>

I do not think that it is an act of Christian to keep two such people tied together in a life that is a torture nor do I think that it is right for them only to be allowed to separate and never to be allowed to try to start again. In such circumstances, I believe that divorce is the action of Christian love, for I do not think that Jesus would have insisted that two utterly incompatible people should be condemned to drag out a loveless existence, heartbreaking for themselves and disastrous for their children.

---

<sup>4</sup>Hans Haselbarth, *Christian Ethics in African Context* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976), p. 78.

<sup>5</sup>Andrew Cornes, *Questions About Divorce and Remarriage*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1995), p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>William Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 203-204.

