

CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: AN EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 19:1-

9 AND

IT'S IMPLICATION FOR LIFE-LIGHT BIBLE MINISTRY

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DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

JUNE, 2019

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DECLARATION

I Alfred Opoku Baah do hereby declare that his dissertation long essay is the result of my own original research except for sections for which references have been duly made and to the best of my knowledge, no part of it has been presented to the this University College for any institution for award of a degree.

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DEDICATION

The work is dedicated to my lovely family who have been an inspiration and pillar of support behind through thick and thin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My profoundest appreciation goes to the Almighty God for His sustenance, protection and guidance all this while. I am forever indebted to Him. May glory forever be His.

I should also like to express my gratitude to my Project Supervisor, Mr. John Ntsiful, whose intellectually insightful correction, guidance and suggestions remain permanently etched on my mind. I am also indebted to all the lecturers who taught and intellectually guided me through the Programme.

I also acknowledge the irreplaceable support of my dearest wife, Agnes Opoku Gyetua during this time of difficulty. Without her support, I would have been helplessly stranded. She has been a wonderful pillar behind my successful completion of the Programme.

Lastly, my thanks go to my precious daughter, Jemima Opoku Yeboah.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the most unmitigated disasters to afflict the human race has been the nagging incidence of divorce. Its insidious effects are so visible. They permeate every strata of the society – rich, poor, educated and the illiterate alike. Unfortunately, divorce has also become a perniciously pervasive phenomenon throughout the whole of Christendom. Some Biblical scholars and commentators have asserted that the alarming proportion with which divorce is ravaging the society; and particularly the Church, is a general reflection of the moral and the ethical laxity confronting it.¹

It is argued that the Church mirrors the society. Therefore, the moral degeneration underpinning the issue of divorce, to a large extent, represents a failure on the part of the Church, especially so when the menace is quite prevalent within it. Statistics in general about divorce remains as confusing as the controversy itself. According to Grolier's Encyclopedia, "In the United States in 1987, there were 123 divorced persons for every 1,000 married persons." It is certain that thirty years later, the statistics is now much higher. In 1981, marriages were said to have reached a record of 2,422,000 in the United States.² Meanwhile, within the same period the number of divorces was said to have also reached a record total of 1, 213,000 in the United States. Records from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that the marriage rate for the United States in 2005 was 7.5 per 1,000 and the divorce rate was 3.6 per 1,000; suggesting a divorce rate of almost half of all marriages.³

¹ Dane T. L., *Divorce and Remarriage: Untwisting the Knots of Man's Sin* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Baptist Bible Seminary, 2007), 4

² Louis Harris as cited in *Divorce and Remarriage, What Does the Bible Teach?* (www.discoveryseries.org/courses-divorce-and-remarriage/lessons/mixed-signals/) accessed 7th August, 2018.

³ Grolier's Encyclopedia, *Divorce and Remarriage*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 342

Statistics on the subject of divorce and remarriage within the Church also remains either sketchy or hard to find. But divorce is witnessed all over; so the fact that it is prevalent within the Church is a matter beyond dispute. As Barna puts it, the rate of divorce within the Church cannot be underrated, though statistics are not available. He believes the canker within the Church is quite grave.⁴ The problem of divorce and remarriage in the Church is further compounded by the confusion and contradictory positions the Body of Christ adopt as a resolution to the phenomenon. Scholars and students of the Bible, including Reverend Ministers, afford their own interpretations on Jesus' statement on divorce, especially in Matthew 19. Jesus' statement on Matthew 19 has always evoked ecclesiastical debate; for while some argue that adultery should be the only grounds for divorce; others think otherwise.

Divorce and remarriage have always been a sensitive issue even before the advent of Jesus on the earth. What He did was to sort the issue out. But the Church has made heavy weather of its interpretation. On one occasion, the Prophet Ezra permitted the men of Israel to divorce their pagan wives they had married (Ezra 10:10-17). Later, Jesus Himself prescribed sexual unfaithfulness as the sole basis for divorce (Matthew 19:9). Even what Jesus meant by sexual immorality is a source of controversy. Some commentators believe that 'sexual immorality' cannot be limited exclusively to the incidence of sexual infidelity. Craig, for instance, uses the term to include other kinds of sexual misdemeanor such as "incest, homosexuality, prostitution, molestation, or indecent exposure."⁵ In 1 Corinthians 7:15, however, the Apostle Paul taught that divorce is admissible if a believer is married to a non-believer who no longer wants to be married.

⁴ Barna G., "Variation in Divorce Rates among Christian Faith Groups, accessed 8th August, 2018. URL: http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm.

⁵ Craig B., "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," *Trinity Theological Journal* 1 no.12 (1990): 177.

Even in that case, the Apostle places the discretion to leave on the non-believer. What then should the resolution be if the unbeliever would not want to leave quietly; but yet poses a serious threat to the believer's belief in Christ? Undoubtedly, the twin phenomenon of divorce and remarriage still merits some research. These are some of the controversies the research topic seeks to unravel, using Jesus' teaching on marriage in Matthew 19 as template.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Church has been characterized by deep divisions on what precisely should be the interpretation of Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:9. The clergy has been saddled with problems of divorce and remarriage among their congregation. In Matthew 19:6, Jesus explains that ".....what God has joined together, let no man separate." He further reiterates in emphatic words in verse 9 that ".....whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." How a church interprets these profound sayings of Jesus Christ is obviously going to affect the rate of divorce in the church of which Life-Light Bible Ministry is not an exception. The relative ease with which divorce is secured and remarriage arranged within some Churches have raised eyebrows. Equally worrying are the differing views as to the exact Biblical principles which should form the basis of divorce and remarriage. The controversy has been as baneful and destructive as the phenomenon itself. What was the import of Jesus' statement on marriage in Matthew 19? And why are there so many interpretations on the subject? Do they order well for the Body of Christ? The study seeks to examine the thorny issue of divorce and remarriage within the context of Matthew 19 and the implication it has for Light-Light Bible Ministry.

1.3 Research Questions

Research questions are concise, interrogative statement framed in the present tense and usually with one or more variables. The study seeks to take a look at the following:

Principal Question

- i. Is adultery the sole basis for the dissolution of marriages according to Matthew 19:1-9.

Secondary Question

- ii. How do the leadership and members of Life-Light Bible Ministry interpret Matthew 19:1-9 in relation to divorce and remarriage?
- iii. How does their position on divorce and remarriage affect lives in Life-Light Bible Ministry?

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the study is to ascertain what the biblical basis of divorce really is.

The objectives of the study include

- i. To investigate the appropriate means in dealing with the problem of divorce in Life-Light Bible Ministry.
- ii. To analyse implications of divorce for Life-Light Bible Ministry.

1.5 Scope and focus of Study

Some New Testament passages on divorce and remarriage will be examined but these will complement the primary text on Matthew 19:5-9. Some Reverend Ministers and

Christian marriage experts will be interviewed. Group interviewing would also be done within *Life-Light Bible Ministry*.

1.6 Research Methodology

The issues of research design, population and sample, data collection and analysis; techniques and ethical regulations constitute crucial bedrock of any research work worthy of its sort. They are the signposts governing the conduct of any research work. Guba and Lincoln's contend that the issue of paradigm is a fundamental importance to any research enquiry, and should come before the choice of methods.⁶

The researcher is a qualitative research and employs the historical critical method. For Collis and Hussey, a qualitative research work investigate the nature of reality, as regards the subject of study; and with the way knowledge is generally constructed of the subject; so that the difference becomes distinct. Since the research work dealt with some stated principles about a phenomenon vis-à-vis people's understanding and perception about the issue, a qualitative research was more appropriate.⁷ Historical critical method is often used to investigate the origin of ancient text in order to understand the world behind the text.⁸

⁶ Guba G, Yvonn A., Lincoln, S. Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (CA: Sage Thousand Oaks, 1994), 105-117.

⁷ Collis J., & Hussey R., *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students* (2nd ed.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003),

⁸ Soulen Richard and Soulen Kendall, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 34

1.6.1 Methods of Data Collection

The study relied on two approaches for gathering data. The first method of data collection was through primary sources in which the researcher relied on interviews. The interviews covered churches and mission organizations working in the area. The second approach of data collection was through secondary data in which publications such as books, magazines, journals, brochures, and internet sources were thoroughly examined in order to ascertain the needed information for the study.

1.6.2 Sample/Sampling Procedure or Technique

Neuman stated that samples of potential participants represent the population of interest.⁹ The participant sample will be identified by the researcher based on his understanding of the participant profile and willingness of the participants to engage in the research study reflecting a snowballing technique for establishing a valid sample frame.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

Method used in analysing the data will be the content analysis approach. According to Creswell, the process of data analysis “involves making sense out of texts and image data. It involves preparing the data by moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data.”¹⁰ Nachmias also said “it is a method where the content of the message forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content.” Ocran, affirmed that

⁹ William Creswell James, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research design: choosing design among five approaches 3rd ed.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 41

¹⁰ New F. C Nachmias, *Research methods in the social sciences*, (New York: Knopf Martin’s Press, 1996), 23

content analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words or concept within the text or sets of text.¹¹

1.7 Limitation of the Research

The greatest limitation of the fieldwork lies in the fact that time constraint did not allow for the broadening of number of respondents to cover a diversity of Churches as possible. For, instance, respondents from the Catholic, the Anglican and the Methodist could have been added to the interviewing list. Also, a research method like focus group could have broadened and diversified the scope of response.

1.8 Literature Review

Beyond doubt, the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage has remained one of the most disconcerting difficulties confronting mankind – of people both in and outside the realm of God’s Kingdom. There have been considerable differences of opinion as to the precise design, scope, meaning and application of Jesus’ command on the issue of divorce and remarriage. Not only is it a sensitive issue; but also highly divisive phenomenon in Christendom.

John Murray, a revered Presbyterian theologian, drawing on Matthew 5:32, has asserted: The only reason for which this remarriage can be regarded as adultery is that the first marriage is still in God’s sight regarded as inviolate. The divorce has not dissolved it. Illegitimate divorce does not dissolve the marriage bond and consequently the fact of such divorce does not relieve the parties concerned from any of the obligations incident to marriage.¹²

¹¹ Bernard Ocran, *Research Methods: Processes, Concepts and Methods*. (Accra, Varsity Scholar Series, 2012), 45

¹² Dane T. L., *Divorce and Remarriage: Untwisting the Knots of Man’s Sin* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Baptist Bible Seminary, 2007), 4

He appears to concede the fact that marriage, as an institution, is an inviolable oath in the sight of God. And its annulment must be premised on a properly laid-down reason as dictated by the Holy Scriptures. For him, divorce should not be entertained for any flippant reason. Murray, nevertheless, sounds ambivalent about the subject matter of remarriage after divorce. As far back as 1949, he had stressed: “the case is simply that we are not able to find biblical warrant for affirming that the person who has been divorced for adultery commits another act of adultery when he or she remarries.”⁸

Craig Keener also proffers his thoughts on the same Bible verse (Matthew 5:32); and seems to share the views expressed by Murray. It is his contention that ‘marriage is valid in God’s sight until one party dissolves the marriage through unfaithfulness.’¹³

The Catholic Church, on its part, strictly emphasizes the indissoluble nature of marriage as a sacred institution ordained by God. The Roman Catholic Canon Law no. 1141 states in part: “Marriage which is ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any human power, nor by any cause save death.”¹⁴ The Catholic Church, nevertheless, recognizes divorce in some circumstances such as adultery; or in situations where either or both parties remain unbaptized in the Church. The attachment of baptism to marital dissolution is apt to throw up some sparkles of curiosity.

Even among great God’s Generals of old, the differences on the remarriage were very sharp. Luther held the notion that accommodated remarriage as necessary on the basis of adultery and desertion; a view underpinned by the thought that “God will not demand the impossible”¹⁵ Calvin supported the above view and believes that adultery

¹³ Craig K. et al, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 35.

¹⁴ Craig, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New*, 36

¹⁵ Craig, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New*, 36

and desertion by the unbeliever renders null and void the marital obligation that wedded the two parties together. In certain situations, Calvin permitted divorce and remarriage resulting from extreme religious incompatibility and impotence; or if some physical infirmity constrained conjugal relations. For Calvin, sharp doctrinal differences were just enough to warrant divorce.¹⁶

John Knox had a strong view about divorce. For him, divorce should not be allowed under any circumstances, except in cases of adultery. A party could remarry after he or she had demonstrated a genuine sense of penitence; for “if they cannot remain continent, we cannot forbid them to use the remedy ordained by God.”¹⁷

There is absolute lack of unitary opinion on the issue of divorce and remarriage within the body of Christ. Arndt et al throw in another dimension to the discourse that lends itself to debate. They argue that the reason Jesus gives, in Matthew 5:32, for divorce should not be restricted to only adultery. Jesus used the term for various forms of sexual sin – including adultery¹⁰ According to them, sexually related sins as referred by Jesus cannot be exclusively limited to adultery. Craig notes that “in Matthew 5, the Greek term used for sexual immorality is the term *porneia* which can include adultery, may include other sexual kinds of such as “incest, homosexuality, prostitution, molestation, or indecent exposure.”¹⁸

Matthew 19 is usually used as the template for the discussion of divorce and remarriage. It has been argued by some scholars that the Pharisees had come to Jesus to test Him and commit

¹⁶ Craig, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New*, 36

¹⁷ Snuth D., *Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 93.

¹⁸ W. Arndt, Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., and Bauer, W. eds., *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature : A translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Worterbuch zu den Schrift en des Neuen Testaments und der ubrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 693.

Him to make some utterances that would conflict with popular theological opinions at the time. Two schools of thought prevailed at the time – that of famous Rabbis, Shammai and Hillel. The former taught that a man could not divorce his wife, except for the commitment of some type of immoral or immodest act, including adultery itself. Hillel, on the other hand, taught a much more liberal view that a man could divorce the wife on any grounds.¹⁹

But Jesus rebuked them and sought to straighten them up. He told them: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries woman commits adultery.”

(Matthew 19:9). There is a caveat clause embedded in Jesus’ statement. He was making it abundantly clear that a divorce would be seen as adulterous, unless it was occasioned by marital infidelity on the part of a spouse.

For most of the commentators, infidelity should be the only premise upon which the annulment of marriage must be allowed. The question then has been posed frequently to those who belong to this school-of-thought: what happens to those marriage partners pulled to the precipice by violent partners or partners with murderous intents? Should they divorce in such circumstances? If yes, are they permitted to remarry? What happens to a man or a woman whose spouse deserts them for good?. Philpot support the view:

Where violence is pushed to the edge of cruelty and life endangered; where....., the wife's life is really in danger..... she may leave her husband, for who would counsel her to stay to be murdered?''²⁰

¹⁹ Craig, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New*, 112-117

²⁰ J.C. Philpot, *Gospel Standard: Divorce*, accessed on 20th October 2018. url: <https://www.gracegems.org/Pink/divorce.htm>

It is worthy of note that two Biblical references – Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 6:18; which are parallel Scriptures with Matthew 19:4-6 drop the exception clause. The uncertainties and confusion surrounding the matter of divorce and remarriage have disposed some Bible commentators to speculate as to why Mark and Luke did not include the constraining clause.

Some of the reasons proffered by some commentators on the issue are as follows:

- (a) That Jesus really never gave the exception clause but it was added by Matthew.
- (b) That the exception clause was necessary to obviate the tendency of Jewish men divorcing to marry gentile women.²¹
- (c) That Matthew 19 allows for no divorce and remarriage.¹⁸
- (d) That the absence of the clause in Mark and Luke are due to exaggeration in showing a general rejection of divorce and remarriage as being acceptable, although specific situations would allow for a remarriage.²²

1.9 Significance of Study

The study is important in that it helps to deepen knowledge and understanding on the Christian phenomenon of divorce and remarriage in *Life-Light Bible Ministry*. The subject has been a gnawing issue that has plagued the Body of Christ for some time now. The study would help throw light on the issue in relation to what a proper interpretation of Matthew 19 is, as regards divorce and remarriage. An in depth examination of the issue would furnish a thorough understanding on the subject and help teach and regulate the phenomenon in the Ministry.

²¹ J. M. Weibling, “Reconciling Matthew and Mark on Divorce.” *Trinity Theological Journal* 22:2 (2001): 219- 234.

²² Weibling, *Reconciling Matthew and Mark on Divorce*. 219 -234.

1.10 Organisation of Chapters

Chapter One concentrated on the general introduction of the study, and such areas as statement of problem; research questions; scope and focus of the study, methodology; literature review; methodology and limitation of study. **Chapter Two** analysed divorce and remarriage within the context of Matthew 19:1-9. Paul's teaching on divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 was also looked at. **Chapter Three** presented the data from the field work; whilst **Chapter Four** analysed and discussed the findings. **Chapter Five** dealt with the conclusion, summary and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE – ANALYSING MATTHEW CHAPTER 19

2.1 Introduction

The issue of divorce and remarriage cannot be thoroughly discussed without an adequate analysis of the Jesus' statements on the subject as found in Matthew 19. However, Matthew 19 cannot stand alone in any thorough examination of divorce and remarriage. Other parallel Scriptures such as Mathew 5:32, 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 must come into play. Their relation to; and point of departure from Matthew 19, must be sufficiently factored into the discussion. One of the main contentious issues that effortlessly erupts from the discussion is the "exception clause" in Matthew 19, which is conspicuously absent from the other corresponding Scriptures. Whilst Matthew mentions it twice, Mark and Luke exclude it entirely.

This has always evoked debate among some Biblical scholars. Section 4.2 of this part dealt with the contextual text that generated the response from Jesus. Section 4.3 concentrated on Jesus' response on divorce. 4.4 took a look at the exception clause; whilst section 4.5 dwelt on the issue of separation or divorce. Section 4.6 also concerned with Paul's teachings on Divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-16). 4.7 dealt with whether the Scriptures permits remarriage; whilst 4.8 concluded the Chapter.

2.2 Background to the Text

The discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees erupted following latter's decision to test Him.

They asked him: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (NKJV). Though the question is held – among Scholars - to be a test, it is generally believed that the general debate between the Shammai and Hillel schools-of-thought might have engendered the question. The controversy had bothered on the thorny issue of divorce and remarriage based on Deuteronomy 24:1 before this question, the right to divorce was held as an explicitly clear provision from Deuteronomy 24:1. The only bone of contention was the grounds upon which the man could exercise that right. It pivoted on the phrase “some uncleanness” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Shammai and his followers were inclined towards a more conservative position. For him and his followers, adultery and moral indecency were the only justifiable grounds for divorce. But Hillel and his adherents, on the contrary, proffered a wider interpretation. They contended that other reasons beyond sexual misconduct could entitle a man to put away his wife for remarriage.²³ In other words, aside of marital infidelity, any trivial cause could commit the man to activate divorce in his marital relationship and marry another lady of his choice. So, it was against this doctrinal differences that the Pharisees sought to test Jesus. Indeed, it is generally held among Biblical scholars that the object of the questioning was to draw Jesus into “taking sides in the Rabbinic dispute”²⁴

2.3 Jesus’ Response on Divorce

Christ Jesus refused to side with either of the sides. His response demonstrated how distorted their views were on marriage. Jesus set Himself at variance with their

²³ · David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1956), 23

²⁴ · *Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study* (1987). A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

distorted conception of what Moses had written in Deuteronomy 24. This He did by upholding and explaining to them

God's original intention about marriage as a man and a woman who have become one in flesh in a union not to be "put asunder" by any man.

He answered them:

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate." (NKJV). (Matthew 19:4-6).

The Pharisees countered by asking: "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" (NKJV). Jesus then explained to them again that Moses granted the space for divorce because of man's obstinacy towards the Will of God in marriage because it was not so from the beginning. He further taught that: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (NKJV). (Matthew 19:9). In other words, man's self-will in marriage had, to a greater degree, set itself on a collision course with the Creator's primal will. God, in His wisdom, then granted divorce as an instrument to restrain greater evil that might have attended non-divorce.²⁵ Jesus further stressed this in Matthew 5:31 and 32.

²⁵ William F., Arndt Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to St. Luke St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, as cited in *Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study* (1987). A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

The following can be noted from the above scriptures:

- (a) that divorce, in itself, deviates from God's will
- (b) that it appeared that Jesus' response presumes the initiative for divorce to be an exclusive prerogative of the husband. In other words, on a face value, the text – on the face value appears to offer an offended wife no right to seek divorce in matters of marital infidelity.

It is also instructive to note that with the exception of Matthew, both Mark and Luke offer no exception clause on the issue of divorce. In Luke 16:18, we are cautioned that: “whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.” (NKJV). It is also worth noting what Mark 10:79 says about divorce: “...‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’, so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (NKJV). Mark states further in verses 11 and 12 that: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” (NKJV). As indicated earlier, Mark and Luke retain no ‘exception clause’. It is equally significant to register the observation that whilst Matthew appears to place the divorce initiative responsibility on the husband, Mark places it on both.

2.4 The Exception Clause

The “exception clause” – “except for sexual immorality” - in Matthew 19 has generated needless controversy as to its appropriateness or genuineness. These debates are superfluous; and indeed, some bother on plain blasphemy. Whereas Matthew mentions it twice, it is excluded in Mark and Luke. Thus, according to the texts in

Mark and Luke on divorce, the phenomenon constitutes a transgression of God's regulation on marriage. It makes no inclusion of the exceptive clause in Matthew 19. What then does *sexual immorality* refer to, as depicted in Matthew 19? The exception clause in Matthew 19 can be understood within the context of two Greek Words: *Porneia* and *Moicheia*. *Porneia* and *Moicheia* are generally referred to as fornication and adultery respectively.

According to the Greek word for *sexual immorality* is *Porneia*. *Porneia* "is sexual activity outside of a proper marriage relationship regardless of marital status; *moicheia* is unfaithfulness towards one's marriage partner."²⁶ *Porneia* (fornication), then, is a broader term that embraces *Moicheia* (adultery). The 'exception clause' (*Porneia*) has generated needless debates. Some Bible scholars cast doubt on the genuineness of the term. However, Craig Blomrang stretches the meaning of *Porneia* to include adultery and sexual infractions such as "incest, homosexuality, prostitution, molestation, or indecent exposure".²⁷

The protagonists of such a crusade believe the term was inserted at a much later date by the Church, either through Matthew himself; or by another writer.²⁸ They cite Jesus' prohibition on marriage in Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18 as the surest indication that Matthew's "exceptive clause" was inserted. Emil Brunner, for instance, asserts: "it is my definite conviction..... that this phrase, 'saving for the cause of fornication', was not uttered by Jesus Himself but that is an interpolation by the early church"²⁹

²⁶ Dunn W. et al, Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage accessed on 14th January 2016, url: www.highlandsc.org

²⁷ Bloomberg C. "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, And Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12" *Trinity Theological Journal* 1 no: 2 (1990): 34

²⁸ Willoughby C. A., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* in *The International Critical Commentary*. (Edinburgh : T & T Clark. 1907), 12

²⁹ Bontrager E., *Divorce and the Faithful Church*. (Pensylvania: Herald Press, 1973), 78

It is, indeed, difficult to fathom why such writers cast intellectual aspersions on Matthew's account of what the Jesus said about divorce. Such thesis about any portion of the Scriptures does not redound to the glory of God, especially when the Doubting Thomases have not proffered any proof to sustain their claim. God's Word is settled in Heaven (Psalm 119:89). It is crucially important to note that Matthew was a disciple of Jesus Himself.

His version cannot be discredited. The different texts on the issue complement each other and provide for the totality of where Jesus stood on the matter. They cannot be said to be at variance with one another. Not every writer could have captured the same details of events or teachings of Jesus.

2.5 Separation or Divorce?

. *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”* (Matthew 19:9)

The whole teaching of Jesus about divorce unmistakably indicates that divorce should not be a priority in marriage. It was not part of God's original intentions for the marriage institution. He allowed divorce to be incorporated into the Laws because of man's obstinacy. It was because a man had undermined God's perfect regulations governing the institution by his rebellion. In that case, divorce permitted – though circumscribed – to obviate greater evil. In God's eyes, divorce was evil; for it stood in flagrant repudiation of His perfect will for marriage

By rebuking the Pharisees for their legalistic position on divorce; and indicating that it was not so from the beginning' meant a wake-up call for the need to return to God's original intentions for marriage. Jesus was emphasising the fact that divorce stood

opposed to God's primal will about marriage. He was by no means advocating that marital unfaithfulness should necessarily result in divorce. He showed us God's ideal will that there should be no divorce at all, hence the admonition that 'what God has joined together, let no man separate. "The indication is that divorce is to be viewed only as an extreme measure, not a preferred choice."³⁰

Some Scholars are also of the notion that Jesus did not in any way allude to remarriage. Rather, He meant separation in the case of divorce resulting from marital unchastity. Geoffrey Bromiley is one of those of this school-of-thought. He contends that "no plain mandate for remarriage occurs in any of the sayings - Matthew 19:9 comes closest..."³¹ He further adds that many circumstances may arise and necessitate separation. But divorce in the full context of having to remarry whilst the original partner is still alive falls outside of Jesus' statement on divorce. Impliedly, therefore, Jesus's statement in Matthew 19 on divorce does not conceive of any possibility of remarriage, when the marriage had ended on the rocks of marital unfaithfulness. As already intimated, Jesus in His teachings did not subscribe to divorce as the easiest resort. However, a careful analysis of His teachings of the subject reveals that He permitted it because of evil in that marital infidelity amounted to the commission of evil.

But even within the context of sexual immorality with a marriage, caution is advised because Jesus Himself can grant a repentant heart to the offending party. In line with this, Dunn et al have stressed this fact:

³⁰ Jay A., *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Zondervan: John Knox Press, 1989), 23

³¹ Bromiley G., *God and Marriage* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1980), 12

To seek a divorce on the basis of a single incident of immorality, especially when the offending spouse is fully repentant, may violate not only Jesus' injunction, but may also go against the repeated exhortations in Scripture to forgive one another (Matthew 6:14; Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 18:21-35, note the contextual connection).³²

They, therefore, call for the need to explore the option of forgiveness and counselling with the view to keeping such distressed marriages intact.

They cite God's patient forbearance with; and forgiveness of Israel for her unfaithfulness in Jeremiah 3:6-8 as a model of longsuffering worthy of emulation in marriage: "And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.'" (Jeremiah 3:7). Dunn et al. again draw on the image of Hosea's boundless longsuffering and forgiveness for his wife, Gomer, who persistently committed harlotry. God urged Hosea: "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods..." (Hos. 3:1). Obviously, the language employed in both Jeremiah and Hosea's circumstances can be said to be figurative. Yet, it presents us with a snapshot of how graciously magnanimous offended parties should be to culprits of sexual immorality.

2.6 Paul's teachings on Divorce: 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

In discussing the Apostle Paul's teaching on divorce, it is significant to note the historical context within which he made the statements. Some Corinthians had argued that it was better to remain single than to be married. Such were of the opinion that

³² Dunn W. et al, Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage accessed on 14th January 2016, url: www.highlandsc.org

living a celibate life made one more pious than otherwise. They attempted to apply this principle to all Christians. The Apostle had written to straighten them. He addressed them on a wide range of marital issues. But in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, he deals with two categories of people: believers considering divorce and divorce concerning believers married to unbelievers. We focus on these two groups.

2.6.1 Married Christian Spouses

He states in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 a husband or wife is not to depart from the spouse. If they do, they should remain unmarried or be reconciled to each other. That would be enforcing the Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:6 that 'what God had put together let no man put asunder.' So, they remain unmarried; or be reconciled to each other.

2.6.2 Believers Married to Unbelieving Spouses

To believers married to unbelieving spouses, Paul does not espouse the dissolution of a marriage between believing spouses and non-believing ones. In verses 12-16, he enjoins believing husbands or wives not to divorce their unbelieving spouses, if they are willing to live with them; for the unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believing ones. However, the unbelieving spouse should be allowed to depart, if he or she feels so. In that case the believing spouse will not be under any bondage because 'God has called us to peace'.

2.7 Is Remarriage Permitted By the Scriptures?

Remarriage is permitted by the Scriptures under certain defined conditions. Jesus' statement above clearly permits divorce in a marital union in a situation where one partner had sexually miscondacted themselves. But He does not advocate divorce; because He also demonstrates in

His teaching that God permits divorce because of the evil in human heart. But that was not God's primary will from the beginning when He created marriage. Some commentators have argued strongly that Jesus's teachings on marriage in Matthew 5 and 19 make no room for divorce. But Richard Vincent counters this thesis with a powerful statement below:

“The sentence in Matthew 19:9 involves a singular subject (‘whoever’) with a relative clause (‘divorces his wife...and marries another woman’) and one verb (‘commits adultery’). The verse without the exception clause reads as follows: ‘Whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman commits adultery.’ It is grammatically impossible for the main verb ‘commits adultery’ to refer to two different subjects. The ‘whoever’ commits adultery except in one case (‘except for immorality’). In contrast, the exception clause highlights the fact that the one who divorces and remarries in light of a spouse’s sexual immorality does not commit adultery... We could read the verse then in this way: ‘Whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman commits adultery. But in the case of sexual immorality, whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman does not commit adultery.’”³³

³³ Richard J. Vincent., Divorce and Remarriage: Pastoral Applications of the Reformed Position, accessed on 15th February 2019, url: www.storage.cloversites.com

Though the Scriptures do not encourage divorce, it makes allowance for it in cases of adultery.

This disengages the offended party from any obligation to the offending spouse. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, the Apostle instructs a wife not to separate from her husband. Otherwise, she should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. As already indicated, Paul bars a remarriage here because there would not have been a valid reason for the separation or the dissolution of the marriage. Fornication or desertion, the only exception, would have been absent in the relationship.

2.8 Conclusion

Divorce and remarriage is a very thorny issue because God hates divorce. Though He grants divorces in some circumstances, it is not His ideal will for man. He does allow it because of evil and the hardness of the human heart. In the absence of fornication, a person who abandons or divorces the spouse commits disobedience against the LORD. And a remarriage throws up the transgression adultery; because he or she commits the remarried partner to commit adultery. He or she also becomes a likely candidate of adultery. In cases where non-believing spouses decides to leave their marriages involving believing spouses, the Apostle Paul enjoins such believers to allow them that space, though he specifically did not allude to remarriage.

CHAPTER THREE

BACKGROUND TO LIFE-LIGHT BIBLE MINISTRY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains data of interviews conducted both within and outside *Life-Light Bible Ministry* on Jesus' teachings on marriage in Matthew 19. The idea was to discover the extent to which such views corresponded with or deviated from the existing literature. Section 3.2 concerned itself with the research design; whilst part 3.3 dwelt on methods of data collection. Section 3.4 set out the limitation of the Research; and part 3.5 rolled out the findings. 3:6 had concluded with the chapter.

3.2 Divorce

All the respondents agreed in unison that based on Christ Jesus's teaching in Matthew 19, divorce could be granted marriage couples under clearly-defined Scriptural rules. Nevertheless, they were all quick to point out that divorce deviated from the will of God. Three of the Reverend Ministers from the Assemblies of God, Pentecost; and the Apostolic Churches respectively cited the instance where Jesus referred to Moses' statement on divorce in Matthew 19:8-11 to substantiate this view. Another Pastor from Pentecost Church asserted:

From the LORD's own words, sexual immorality is the only reason for which marriage can be annulled. It is true that the LORD grants the right to divorce to any aggrieved partner in a marriage in the case of the other partner having misconducted themselves sexually. Yet, we need to explore ways to solve the issue first in the case of infidelity before any other step could be initiated.

On the issue of whether adulterous culprits in marriage should be forgiven in lieu of divorce, 6 respondents (constituting 24% of the population - 2 of whom had divorce

background) said No. Those with divorce records explained that adultery is a stab in the back. It is very easy to issue moral platitudes on the matter. But the experience can be painful. 10 respondents (40%), however, agreed that unconditional forgiveness should come into play in such matters. They contended that as God in Christ has forgiven us, so must offended spouses forgive their partners who sexually stray in their marriage. 9 (36%) respondents said “Yes”; but insisted that the forgiveness under such circumstances must be conditional – contingent on genuine penitence on the part of the offending party. It is instructive to note that all those who thought the forgiveness should be unconditional were Pastors. Probably, it is reflective of their calling.

It is after many persistent efforts have failed that divorce could be allowed. An Assemblies of

God Minister had this to say: “It is true that Jesus grants the right to divorce to any aggrieved partner in a marriage in the case of the other partner having misconducted themselves sexually. Yet, we need to explore ways to solve the issue first in the case of infidelity before any other step could be initiated.”

Another issue that cropped up in the course of the interview was that the Church only regulate, arbitrate and help resolve marital issues; but does not commit itself to the dissolution process. The explanation is that if the church failed to broker a peaceful deal between the feuding parties in marriage, it then enlisted the assistance of the extended families to help arrive at amicable solution. If that also yielded futility, the Church then allowed them to seek the divorce either traditionally, or in court – if they registered their marriage. But the Church is not interested in the process. It is left to the family to sort that out. The question of who could initiate divorce was also posed. This issue was asked because this was not explicitly clear in Jesus teaching on divorce.

On this issue too, they all pointed out that the divorce statement was not gender specific.

3.3 Adultery

23 (92%) respondents were of the opinion that adultery should be the only grounds for divorce. But 2 people dissented stressing that though adultery is grounds for divorce per Jesus teaching in Matthew 19, unfaithfulness (as used by some Bible versions) is more than sexual relationship outside of marriage. So the majority definition of the term ‘adultery’ was narrow. One of them from the group interviewing asked: “would the majority definition of adultery include a situation where a married man has a sexual relation with another man; or a married woman has a relationship with an animal (bestiality)?” The other dissenter argued that adultery or unfaithfulness includes even masturbation on the part of either spouse because that also constitute sexual immorality. But the majority disagreed on grounds that certain personal sexual sins would not qualify as a cause for divorce as taught by Jesus in Matthew. A Presbyterian Minister added a very interesting dimension to the issue. He emphasized:

*If you read **Gen 2:25** (And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed). Everything must be open to both of them. In other words, everything was opened to each other. Nothing was concealed from the other. So, sexual immorality is not just an issue of a man or a woman having sexual relationship behind the spouse. Anything that a spouse does behind the husband with the intention of concealing something constitutes sexual immorality in the sense that he or she has decided to hold out on the other partner. Because the two are one in everything, whatever they do must be open to each other.*

3.4 Divorced on Non-Biblical Grounds

From Jesus' teaching on marriage in Matthew 19, remarriage can be acceptable to the Church only when adultery had occurred. So, I asked the respondents, what happens to a spouse who had not been properly divorced – in other words, adultery had not been the basis for the dissolution of the marriage. Could they remarry? 15 respondents (60%) – including 7 Pastors - said they could not be allowed to remarry because the reason for divorce would have fallen outside of terms of reference in Matthew 19. The other 40% made up of 5 Pastors and others thought otherwise in that case the deserted partners would have done no wrong. They should not be made to suffer other's injustices.

3.5 Other reasons for divorce

The researcher also wanted to know if adultery could be the only reason for divorce. I was interested to know if other unforeseen situations (other than adultery) could also provoke divorce and be accepted by the Church. As can be seen in Table 1 (in the Annexures), 15 (60%) people answered in the negative. They averred that they could not accept anything not written in the Scriptures. For them, adultery should be the only cause for divorce. But 10 (40%) of the respondents (mostly Pastors) conceded that apart from adultery, some uncommon occurrences – not captured in Matthew 19 - could call for divorce, though they were quite cautiously guarded in their admission because divorce, they accepted, was a divisive issue. They cited a situation where one partner threatened the other; or continually demonstrated a murderous intent. One Pastor summarized it:

But for me – I am not speaking for someone, I speak for myself – if a married partner stands the risk of losing his or her life because of violence, or anything

that would harm or take the life of the other, it is not worth living in that marriage. The LORD Himself would not be happy about the existence of such a marriage.

On the same issue, another Pastor submitted that “We would not want to say that because God hates marriage, if a partners wants to kill you stay in the marriage.” Another Pastor from the Pentecost Church conceded that ”..... in such cases, we first need to get into the details and find out what could be the cause of such an untoward situation. We don’t quickly agree to divorce in such cases. A solution can be found to such cases. They should not necessarily end up in divorces. We ask ourselves: ‘what necessitated those intents or actions? Can something be done to adequately deal with and solve the situation? If it is necessary to separate them for a while, we do so while through prayers we look for practical solutions to the problem. If that fails, then we hand them over to the families for whatever solution they might want to consider.”

3.6 Remarriage

On the question of remarriage, 100% of the respondents indicated that in a situation where divorce as permitted by the Scriptures had occurred, a remarriage was in accordance with Matthew 19. However, on the question as to who could remarry, perspectives were divided. 7 respondents representing 28% believed both divorced parties could remarry. They thought the Scriptures did not make any exclusion as to who could or could not remarry under the circumstances. The 72% majority did not share the above view. The view was that only the innocent party could remarry; otherwise disobedience and sin would have been rewarded. All the Pastors agreed with the majority. One of them had this to say:

Going by the text, divorce is not permitted, except in the case of marital infidelity. In my opinion, the person who is not guilty of sexual misconduct – and did not cause the disintegration of the marriage – can remarry. In my mind, God will not charge that individual with guilt.

3.7 Desertion

Desertion by believing spouses also attracted divided views. 84% of the interviewing population said in cases where a spouse is unfairly deserted, he or she be allowed to remarry. As to what should be done if the deserted spouse were found to be the cause 16 out of the 21 people suggested that they be punished till they came to genuine repentance before a remarriage could be allowed. But the other 5 taught they must be allowed to bear their own burden. The dissenting 4 (16%) deserted couples should be denied remarriage because the Apostle Paul never mentioned remarriage in his teachings in 1 Corinthians 7. A Pentecost Pastor related an experience in his Church:

Yes, we accept it when it is in accordance with the Scriptures. I know of a man who deserted the wife and went away from her matrimonial home and went in for another woman for cohabitation (not marriage). The woman comported herself till a man married her. The first husband then later came apologising but the woman told her she had already been married by another man. He apologised profusely. We came in; but upon realizing that another man had married her, we thought there was nothing we could do about it.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented the data that was collected from the field. The presentation was based on the categorization of the themes that emerged from the data. The findings

were thermalized as follows: divorce; divorced on non-Biblical grounds; adultery; other reasons for divorce; remarriage and desertion. All the respondents outside church revealed that adultery is the only grounds for divorce, but among those interviewed in church, one respondent said that unfaithfulness can constitute another grounds for divorce. But differences emerged on the scope of the term “adultery” in Matthew 19. Respondents had differing outlooks on almost all the itemized data.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The dissertation aimed at exploring the concept of divorce and remarriage. It sets out to delve into the subject within the context of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19. The study sought to examine critically Matthew 19:1-9 to ascertain the issue of whether or not adultery should be the sole basis for the dissolution of marriages in Life-Light Bible Ministry.

4.2. Divorce

The findings indicate that respondents were much divided on the question of divorce. They all contented that based on Matthew 19, divorce was permissible in cases of adultery, though they were quick to add that the phenomenon was not God's perfect Will for married couples. As one Pastor asserted: "From the LORD's own words, sexual immorality is the only reason for which marriage can be annulled. It is true that Jesus grants the right to divorce to any aggrieved partner in a marriage in the case of the other partner having miscondacted themselves sexually. Yet, we need to explore ways to solve the issue first in the case of infidelity before any other step could be initiated."

But some commentators have, surprisingly controverted it. Thus according to Bromiley, Jesus in His teaching does not subscribe to divorce. Rather, he asserts further that Matthew's account of Jesus teaching conceives of only separation in the event of sexual unfaithfulness in marriage.³⁴ Bromiley's position is inherently

³⁴ Bromiley G., *God and Marriage* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids,1980), 56

problematic; and further exacerbates the deep controversies enveloping Jesus' teaching on marriage. Jesus' teaching gives the space for divorce on the basis of adultery.

Yet, some of the respondents were not advocates of forgiveness in cases of adultery, though forgiveness is one of the cardinal principles of Christianity. Dunn et al have stressed the fact that to demand divorce on the basis of a single incident of adultery may violate Jesus' principle of forgiveness.³⁵ For some, it might not be difficult to forgive a penitent culprit; others were of the view that forgiveness should be unconditional. Some scholars have advocated the forgiveness modeled on that of Hosea (Hosea 3:1).³⁶ For how long can one bear the over indulgence of a serial offender?

There was another issue of who could initiate a divorce. It was not a clear-cut issue in Jesus' statement in Matthew 19. But all of the respondents thought that Jesus' statement was not gender-specific. But this answer could not be taken at face value because Deuteronomy 24:1 upon which Jesus expanded in Matthew 19 did not accord the right of divorce to women. It was the other way round. Neither does Matthew 19. Can married women divorce their husbands on the basis of adultery within the strictest interpretation of Jesus' teaching on the issue in Matthew 19? These are some of the gray areas on Matthew 19 that Pastors upon prayers might draw wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

³⁵ Dunn W. et Al *Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage*, accessed on 16th March, 2019 url: www.highlandscc.org

³⁶ Dunn W. et al, *Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage* accessed on 14th January 2016, url: www.highlandscc.org

4.3 Adultery

What is adultery? This has mostly been a subject of dispute. 23 out of the 25 people agreed that on the basis of Matthew 19, adultery should be the grounds for divorce. Nevertheless, dissention emerged on what the phenomenon was. The majority defined adultery to be sexual relationship outside of marriage. So, for instance, a married man or woman engages in a sexual relationship with another woman or man outside of the marriage could be said to have committed adultery. Most of the Pastors subscribed to this view; but two respondents (including a Pastor) disagreed insisting that the above definition was not broad enough. Here, the minority group had raised a point that could not be easily dismissed.

Fundamentally, immorality is the physical engagement in a sexual activity with a person other than a person's spouse or with an animal. According to the Bible, adultery is sexual engagement where at least one of the individual is married to someone else (Leviticus 20:10). It also cites such immoral sexual relationship as homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22; Roman 1:26-27); and sexual relations with animals – bestiality (Leviticus 18:23)³⁷ Upon these, it will be difficult to restrict adultery or sexual immorality to the majority view in this research.

Craig has defined the term adultery and sexual immorality to include such acts as incest, homosexuality, prostitution, molestation, or indecent exposure.³⁸ Dunn et al expressed the same position.³⁹ Another respondent regarded sexual immorality as also

³⁷ Dunn W. et al, Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage accessed on 14th January 2016, url: www.highlandsc.org

³⁸ Dunn W. et al, Doctrinal Statement and Analysis of Divorce and Remarriage accessed on 14th January 2016, url: www.highlandsc.org

³⁹ K. Craig (1991). *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson.

embodying the intention of concealing anything from one's spouse. He relied on Genesis 2:25.

*If you read **Gen 2:25** (And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed). Everything must be open to both of them. In other words, everything was opened to each other. Nothing was concealed from the other. So, sexual immorality is not just an issue of a man or a woman having sexual relationship behind the spouse. Anything that a spouse does behind the husband with the intention of concealing something constitutes sexual immorality in the sense that he or she has decided to hold out on the other partner.*

That would amount to stretching the issue too far. In that case, a married partner refusing to disclose a personal purchase of a plot of land to the other spouse could be accused of adultery.

His point called for transparency though.

4.4 Divorced on Non-Biblical Grounds

Based on Jesus' teaching on who can remarry upon divorce based on adultery, I was interested to know from the respondents of whether or not a spouse divorced on non-Biblical grounds should be allowed by the Church to remarry. So, for instance, if a man chooses to divorce his wife for no apparent reason, can the wife remarry? If so on what authority? If not, why?

Perspectives differed. 15 out of the 25 respondents contended that a remarriage under such circumstances could not be allowed because that would circumvent Christ Jesus' instructions and the basis for remarriage. The others disagreed indicating that when the victim is innocent then he or she must be made to remarry. Jesus said in Matthew

19:9 that “.....whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” (NKJV). This scenario is different from desertion. It is divorce. In that case, would adultery occur should they be remarried? Such a question raises some of the taken-for-granted assumptions we harbor on Jesus teaching about divorce and remarriage. It is my contention that there are some gray areas on the phenomenon of divorce and remarriage that only the Holy Spirit can help unravel. Such an issue does not present an easy solution, except for the wisdom of the One who created the marriage institution.

4.5 Other Reasons for Divorce

Jesus’ teaching prescribes adultery or sexual immorality as the only basis for divorce. Paul also cited desertion by an unbeliever as one of the basis for divorce, when the latter decides to leave quietly. But can some exigencies call for marriage dissolution when adultery or desertion so described above had not occurred? Majority of the respondents said no; and would not be drawn on anything the Scriptures do not speak on. I probed further and enquired from them what would they do if their married sisters were constantly under threat of death from a wayward husband? Or what should happen to a marriage when a man was found trying to sell the wife, for instance? Would they advocate divorce under such circumstances? They would not answer hypothetical situations. The others, mostly Pastors, conceded that life was not as simple as we viewed it. Some of these negative situations are real in our daily lives. And when they defied amicable solution, divorce could be the only solution, though the Church does not commit itself to the divorce process. They leave it for the family to deal with it. John Calvin permitted divorce and remarriage resulting from extreme

religious incompatibility and impotence; or if some physical infirmity constrained conjugal relations. For Calvin, sharp doctrinal differences were just enough to warrant divorce.⁴⁰ But John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Mission, disagreed strongly insisting that divorce should not be allowed under any circumstances, except in cases of adultery.⁴¹

There have been instances in the Scriptures where God's wisdom has been sought on issues that appeared to be clear-cut in the Scripture. A clear example can be fetched from Numbers 27 where the daughters of Zelophehad stood before Moses and asserted that though their father had no son, they felt they were entitled to their father's inheritance as the surviving daughters.

According to the law, the father's inheritance should have passed to the sons. The law initially did not make any allowance for daughters. But Moses went back to God for the answer. "And Moses brought the issue before the LORD." (Numbers 27:5). The LORD vindicated them. The law was gray on that specific matter. Divorce and remarriage is not any different.

4.6 Desertion

The Apostle Paul discussed the phenomenon of desertion in 1 Corinthians 7; but did not refer to remarriage in cases where a spouse had been deserted. His teachings on desertion touched on marriages between believers and non-believers in which the latter decide to leave. I asked of what should happen if a believer deserts a believer. Should the deserted spouse be made to remarry? Majority of respondents believed where a

⁴⁰ Snuth D, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* 16 no. 2 (1990): 131ff.

⁴¹ Snuth, *Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church to John Wesley*, 131

spouse is deserted, he or she must be made to remarry. The rest objected to the majority view in that it was not specifically stated by the Apostle.

Sometimes, Scripture can be used to throw light on Scripture. It is my view that in such a case, if the deserter appears recalcitrant, church discipline must be brought to bear on the matter. In such circumstances, the resolution process in Matthew 18:15-17 must be activated. If the individual deserter remains hard-hearted, he or she must be treated as an unbeliever, in accordance with Matthew 18:17. He or she becomes a deserter in accordance with the dictates of Corinthians 7:15. And in line with I Corinthians 7:15, 1 Corinthians 7:27 and 28 could also be triggered. The Apostle Paul asked: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned....”

These Scriptures can be applied to a deserted spouse. ‘To be loosed’ means to be disengaged from an obligation. So, once the deserter premeditatedly decides to leave, the victim is released from their obligation to their deserted spouses.

4.7 Conclusion

The chapter analysed and presented the findings based on the research questions and compared to the literature reviewed in chapter one. The findings revealed that there are some many gray areas in the interpretation of Matthew 19, in relation to divorce and remarriage. Usually, some of these nagging questions had been resolved on the basis of Churches differing doctrines. An issue of such nature is whether or not an offended spouse whose adulterous behaviour resulted in the disintegration of the first marriage must be made to remarry later If the Church enjoins its members to be more accommodative and forgiving; then it is also required of the Church to grant any

penitent offenders in these matters the opportunity to remarry. Cases must be decided on their own merit with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The dissertation explored the question of divorce and remarriage in the context of Matthew 19. The phenomenon of divorce and remarriage is a divisive issue in the Body of Christ with different Churches having various strands of interpretation. Such divisions have become a plague riveted upon the necks of the Churches. Scholars, commentators, Reverend Ministers and ordinary Church members have all had their different perspectives on some issues on the subject. The study sought to contribute to the subject.

5.1 Methodology

The research work dealt with the phenomenon of divorce and remarriage as regards people's understanding and perception about the issue. As a result, a qualitative research was more appropriate to understanding people's perception about the phenomenon. I, therefore, employed semi-structured interviewing as a major research method in my research work. That was the easiest way to elicit response from people about the subject. I also used content analysis in reviewing the literature relating to the contextual text – Matthew 19.

5.2 The overall research questions

5.2.1. Adultery the sole basis for divorce, according to Matthew 19?

Adultery is the only grounds upon which divorce could be procured in relation to Christ Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19. It is unmistakably clear. Nevertheless, some circumstances as desertion of a believing spouse by a believing spouse might call for remarriage. Again, a spouse who becomes obsessed with murderous intent against the

other spouse could not be trusted with such a marriage. The Scriptures provide a strict rule or frameworks to regulate conducts, behaviours and relationships. But the Holy Spirit must be depended upon to enable us interpret the Scriptures according to His Will. The mere reliance on the letter can sometimes kill. There are certainly some gray areas in connection with Matthew 19 such as follows:

- (a) Who divorces whom? The text appears to grant men the exclusive right to initiate divorce in cases where their spouses have gone overboard, though all the Reverend Ministers interviewed considered Jesus' teaching as gender neutral. Can married women so offended initiate divorce against their husbands within the strictest interpretation of Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 19?
- (b) Who can remarry when a divorce had been necessitated by adultery? Here too, the refrain has mostly been that the innocent party can remarry in consonance with Jesus' teaching on the subject. What then happens to the guilty party? Can sinners not repent?
- (c) What happens if a man after having married a woman refused to consummate the marriage with sexual intimacy? Would the Church allow for divorce in such instances?

In some of these hard cases, the Holy Spirit must be relied upon for divine wisdom. A clear example can be fetched from Numbers 27 where the daughters of Zelophehad stood before Moses and asserted that though their father had no son, they felt they were entitled to their father's inheritance as the surviving daughters. According to the law, the father's inheritance should have passed to the sons. The law initially was silent of the issue. But Moses went back to God for the answer. "And Moses brought the issue before the LORD." (Numbers 27:5). The LORD clarified the issue by siding with the

daughters. The law was gray on that specific matter. Another case is recorded in Leviticus 24 where a young man of a Jewish and Egyptian descent blasphemed the name of the LORD. Moses was not sure of what to do. “So, ...they put him in custody, that the mind of God might be shown to them.” (Leviticus 24:12). And the LORD’s mind was, indeed, shown to them.

5.2.2 To examine respondents’ perception on divorce and remarriage

The second question centred on the respondents’ perception on divorce and remarriage. The interviewees response table in percentages as found in the annexures indicate that all of them agreed that adultery is grounds for divorce. However, division erupted on what constituted adultery or sexual immorality. The majority had defined sexual immorality as sexual relationship with another person outside a marriage. The minority disputed that definition, indicating that sexual immorality denotes something of a broader definition than the mainstream narrow definition of the term. Indeed, there appears to be merit in the latter’s position. The minority critique of the conventional definition of the term adultery or sexual immorality is worth reconsidering.

Respondents views on other issues such as divorce on Non-Biblical grounds; remarriage and desertion had been divisive. They reflect the already polarising perspectives on marriages in some scholarly circles. Some Church doctrines have reflected some of these divided outlooks.

It is instructive that most of the Pastors relied on the expression “*in my opinion*” on some of the issues as remarriage, desertion and divorced on non-Biblical grounds. Christ’s teachings must be based on adherence to strict Scriptural doctrines. The expression “*in my opinion*” suggest some amount of uncertainty or doubt in the understanding of Jesus’ teaching on the subject. And as human, we may not have it all

about the teachings of Jesus. We all do not. That is the reason why we must rely on His Spirit for light and wisdom in some of the knotty issues on the matter. It is, therefore, imperative that each Church's doctrine on divorce and remarriage mirrors the true teachings of Christ Jesus on the subject. Where doubts exist, the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be sought after. The sole reliance on the letters of Scriptures to interpret situations could prove very disastrous. As the Scriptures declare: ".....but our sufficiency is from God who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (NKJV) (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

5.3 Implications for Life-Light Ministry

The research has profound implications for the Life-Light Ministry.

- (1) Upon the interviewing, there has been emerging need to consider deliberations on some of the provisions of the Constitution to reflect the fact that in the unfortunate event of divorce, guilty parties could be allowed to remarry upon demonstrable repentance and prayers and counselling.
- (2) Unmarried youth must be educated well to know the will of God in marriage; and on how to choose their married spouses. They need to allow the One who created the marriage institution to lead them to their spouses.
- (3) Ongoing teachings for married couples and unmarried youth must be paramount to enable them avoid some of the pitfalls of divorce.
- (4) Counselling services requisite to godly marriage must be intensified for would-be married couples.

(5) Intensive prayers are an imperative. And the Church's relationship and reliance on the Holy Spirit must be developed and further deepened to solve of the seemingly gray issues relating to divorce and remarriage when they emerge.

5.4 Conclusion

The dissertation sets out to research the phenomenon of divorce and remarriage. Some of the existing literature was reviewed and interviewing of 25 respondents undertaken based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19. A review of the literature indicated that there were as varied views as possible on the teachings of Jesus available. Biblical scholars, commentators and Reverend Ministers also have as many differing perspectives on every issue of divorce and remarriage. Every Christian does. However, Jesus teaching remains the only truth on divorce. It cannot be the subject of so many divergent views and opinions. The truth is the truth. What that means is that some of the contradictory principles and varied views and opinions being applied by the various denominations might be wrong. And how frightening for any Pastor to advertently or otherwise mislead his or her congregation toward the slippery path of error.

God created the institution of marriage as a lifelong union underpinned by love, sacrifice and sexual relationship. God Himself instructs us not to separate what He has joined together. The marital vows are very serious before God; and we must therefore take marriage seriously. However, in cases of crises, as it pertains to every human institution, it is our responsibility to follow God's laid down rules regarding divorce and remarriage. Issues about divorce and remarriage are quite sensitive. It is proper that Pastors and Church elders and all concerned avail themselves of the various issues underlining the phenomenon. The ideal situation would be to prepare unmarried people to rely on God for their godly spouses; to continuously teach married people to love

their spouses unconditionally and treat them well. Ephesians 5:22 enjoins wives to submit to their husbands, as to the Lord. In verse 25, husbands are also admonished to love their wives. Love bothers on mutual respect; and the willingness to see things from each other's perspective.

It is also clear that there are some quite knotty areas on the issue of divorce and remarriage that requires wisdom from above to deal with because some of these issues bother on emotions, will, intentions and perceptions that only God can know them. When Moses was confronted with such a problem relating to an uncharted path in Numbers 27 and Leviticus 24, he had to go on his knees before the LORD for answers. And the LORD was faithful and provided the needed wisdom to deal with the various situations. In much the same way, Christians and Pastors need to be on their knees for answers and not to always rely on their opinions to deal with such important marriage issues.

5.5 Recommendations for Life Light Bible Ministry

The research has profound recommendations for the Life-Light Ministry.

- (1) Upon the interviewing, there has been emerging need to consider deliberations on some of the provisions of the Constitution to reflect the fact that in the unfortunate event of divorce, guilty parties could be allowed to remarry upon demonstrable repentance and prayers and counselling.
- (2) Unmarried youth must be educated well to know the will of God in marriage; and on how to choose their married spouses. They need to allow the One who created the marriage institution to lead them to their spouses.
- (3) Ongoing teachings for married couples and unmarried youth must be paramount to enable them avoid some of the pitfalls of divorce.

- (4) Counselling services requisite to godly marriage must be intensified for would-be married couples.
- (5) Intensive prayers are an imperative. And the Church's relationship and reliance on the Holy Spirit must be developed and further deepened to solve of the seemingly gray issues relating to divorce and remarriage when they emerge.

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APPENDIX

Annexures

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE INTERVIEWING

Table 1: Church Interviewing Response in Percentages

QUESTION	NUMBER OF PEOPLE (25)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Jesus' statement in Matthew 19 allows for Divorce	25	100
2. a) Divorce is only grounds for adultery a) Unfaithfulness is another ground and it means more than adultery	23	92
	2	8
3. a) Adultery is the sexual relationship by married partner outside of marriage b) Adultery means anything unfaithful, apart from sexual misconduct in marriage.	23	92
	2	8
4. Bible permits remarriage a) Yes. Both parties can remarry.		
	7	28
	18	72

b) Yes. But ONLY the innocent parties in divorce can remarry.		
5. Any other reason for divorce apart from sexual immorality? a) No. Not specified in the Bible. b) Yes. Certain circumstances apart from adultery may call for divorce		
	15	60
	10	40
6. Adulterous partners must be forgiven instead of divorce? c) No d) Yes, unconditionally. e) Yes with conditions.		
	6	24
	10	40
	9	36

Table 1 contd

QUESTION	NUMBER OF PEOPLE (25)	PERCENTAGE (%)
7. Should deserted Christians remarry?		
a) Yes	21	84
b) No	4	16

