**KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE AMONG CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL IN IKWO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA EBONYI STATE NIGERIA**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background of the study**

Divorce is one of the core vices that have posed a lot of challenges to human kind in different dimensions. This is true in that, the problem of divorce is not just to Christians alone but people from all works of life. According to Jay, there is hardly a Christian family or society that does not know the pains of divorce directly or indirectly. He said, in medieval era, homes were held in high esteem where the husband and wife stayed together to fulfill the plans and purpose of God for their lives (140). In recent times, divorce has become one of the greatest threats to society, for it destroys one of the most basic societal institutions, the family. The threat is even greater to Christians today because of its numerous problems associated with it. Since there cannot be divorce without marriage, Scott defined marriage as an institution ordained by God to be a permanent, indissoluble life-long covenant relationship and union between a man and a woman for the purpose of fulfilling an innate need for community and procreation (14).

Procreation and companionship are the basic twin purposes for marriage. However, companionship seems to be superior because it is possible to have a real marriage without children, but without companionship the production of children does not fulfill the purpose of marriage. In recent times, the ever-increasing number of divorce have been posing a serious threat to the marriage institution which is valued very highly by all human cultures and religious traditions. Dominion explained that a careful examination of the contemporary nature of marriage will reveal the exact change. Hence, a healthy family is imperative for a healthy society and the church at large (14).Christian, Traditional and Islamic religions generally have certain ways of conducting marriages and how such marriages are expected to be guided by certain rules and regulations of such faiths. It is therefore true that people in all cultures and in all ages have considered marriage as a natural gift to humanity. It can therefore be said with certainty that the institution of marriage is one that is natural and common to all human kind. In most cultures, neither man nor woman is considered incomplete after reaching a certain age without a spouse (Nwoye and Nnena71). Though, all religious traditions highly value the institution of marriage, Christianity holds the institution of marriage in a more exalted position in comparison to all other religions. It is, however, not surprising that, the sublimity of Christian teachings has not deterred some of its followers from seeking civil divorce. Christians in Nigeria are also experiencing the effects of divorce in different ways, for the inability of a couple to understand what marriage leery is, marks the beginning of conflicts between a husband and a wife which sometimes results into divorce.

**1.2 Statement of the problem**

In spite of the suffering involved in divorce, the rate of divorce continues to soar high even in our Churches. There is no single and simple answer to the question of why marriages do not survive the ‘better or worse’, and the reasons for divorce vary from one couple to another. In an extensive review of factors that account for divorce around the world, Lowenstein, identified various factors, including women’s independence; marriage too early and arranged marriages; economic factors; poor intellectual, educational, and social skills; liberal divorce laws; sexual factors leading to incompatibility; role conflicts; alcoholism and substance abuse or risk-taking behaviour; differences between the partners leading to acrimony; religious factors; attitudes toward divorce; and many other factors. No marriage is problem-free. Some endure the ups and downs while others unfortunately fall to one of the very many reasons for divorce. There has been a vast increase in the rate of divorce in Nigeria and the highest percentage is in Christian marriages.

Today, marriages are no longer as stable as they used to be in our churches. There are indications that divorce rates have the potential to become a public health problem in Nigeria. There is an assertion that the family is the nucleus of society therefore the society becomes unstable when the family structure is shaken. It is against this backdrop that the researcher seeks to assess knowledge and perception of divorce among Christian faithful in Ikwo local government area.

**1.3 Objectives of the study**

1. To explore the impact of divorce on parent-child closeness among Christian faithful.

2. To investigate the views on marriage and divorce held by Christian faithful.

3. To examine the role of Christianity in shaping perceptions and experiences related to divorce among Christian faithful.

**1.4 Research questions**

1. How does divorce affect parent-child closeness among Christian families?

2. What are the prevailing views on marriage and divorce among Christian faithful?

3. How does Christianity influence attitudes and responses towards divorce among Christian faithful?

**1.5 Research hypothesis**

1. There is a negative correlation between divorce rates and parent-child closeness among Christian families.

2. Christian faithful are more likely to hold conservative views on marriage and divorce compared to non-Christian groups.

3. The level of adherence to Christian teachings correlates with the acceptance or rejection of divorce among Christian faithful.

**1.6 Significance of the study**

This study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how divorce is perceived and experienced within Christian communities. It can provide insights for counselors, pastors, and policymakers to better support families going through divorce within these religious contexts. Additionally, it may contribute to discussions on the intersection of faith, family dynamics, and social attitudes towards divorce.

**1.7 Scope and limitations**

The study focuses on Christian faithful from a specific geographical area or denomination, limiting its generalizability to other religious or cultural contexts. The study may also face limitations in gathering data due to the sensitivity of the topic and potential biases in self-reported responses.

**1.8 Definition of terms**

**Parent-child closeness:** Refers to the emotional bond and relationship quality between parents and their children.

**Views on marriage and divorce:** Refers to individual beliefs, attitudes, and opinions regarding the institution of marriage and the acceptability of divorce.

**Christianity:** Refers to the religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ as described in the Bible, including various denominations and interpretations of Christian doctrine.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**BIBLICAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE**

**2.1 Introduction**

It is an undisputable fact that God is the originator of marriage. In the creation of the first couple, God made them male and female in His own image, and His main purpose for marriage was for companionship. Throughout history, the beauty of marriage has been stained in all cultures by conflict, misunderstanding, and incidents of break ups. The issue of divorce seems to be devastating and it is assuming a universal dimension since this menace is found in our societies. In an attempt to address this issue, Scripture is surveyed to understand what it has to say about marriage and divorce. This chapter seeks to explore the biblical view of marriage and divorce and also to address other contemporary challenges with respect to the issue at state.

**2.2The Biblical View of Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament**

**2.2.1Marriage in the book of Genesis**

Genesis 2:24 is seen by many Bible scholars as the basis for the meaning of marriage. The definition of marriage is embodied in the text; “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”.26 This was later quoted by Jesus when He was asked about permissible grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:4-5). Genesis 2:24 was spoken by God right after Eve was brought to Adam, and Adam recognized her as his God-given spouse. It could be deduced that a marriage exists in God’s sight when a man ‘leaves’ his parents, with a view not merely to living apart from them but to ‘cleaving’ to his wife, and ‘become one flesh’ with her.27 The first description of the nature of marriage in the Bible, as consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24), reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. This meaning of marriage as a covenant of companionship is expressed more explicitly later in Scripture in such passages as Malachi 2:14. This would be discussed later under the Prophets. “…It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

A Christian perspective of the purpose and intention of marriage are vital. Marriage is a lifelong commitment between a male and a female that involves mutual sexual rights.28 Some characteristics of the biblical concept of marriage are found in the statement “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24 KJV). This verse mentions that marriage is an exclusive man-woman relationship which is publicly acknowledged and consummated by sexual intercourse. SamueleBacchiocchi expresses these as ‘the components of the marriage covenant’29.

**2.2.1.1‘Leaving’ – The first component of the marriage covenant**

The first step in establishing a marriage covenant is leaving all other relationships, including the closest ones of father and mother: “Therefore shall a man leavehis father and his mother” (Gen 2:24). The key word “leave” expressed in Hebrew asaw-zah, means to release, forsake, leave destitute, or refuse. It is used of loosening bands, as of a beast from it bonds. The Arabic equivalent means “single” or “unmarried.” The idea here is that the man forsakes his parents. He cuts himself off from them. He breaks the “union” with them almost in the sense of divorcing himself and becoming “subsequently single.” It is as if he has been bound to them in a marriage state but, in an act of the will, departs from them regarding responsibility and dependence (if such exists) and becomes alone to unite with the chosen woman. The bridegroom cannot be both a dependent child and an independent husband in the same home. Even in a world infused with the concept of extended families, priorities must be kept straight.30

The text speaks specifically of the man in this matter. It is he who must be his own head of the household. If in family relations he is dependent upon his father, then to whom do his dependents look for authority? It would create for his wife an unworkable hierarchical arrangement: she would have two heads (i.e., her husband and his father), and that, according to Jesus (Matthew 6:24), is not right. In such an arrangement the father’s authority would probably supersede her husband’s, yet, according to the Scripture, it is the latter who is to be her final authority in family matters (Ephesians 5:22 – 34).

Of course, leaving does not mean the abandonment of one’s parents. The responsibility to “Honor your father and mother” (Ex 20:12) is applied by Jesus to adults (Mark 7:6-13). This is not evading our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. Jesus scorned the hypocrisy of those who gave to the Temple the money they had set aside for their parents (Mark 7:9-13). As adults, however, we assume responsibility for our parents rather than to them. The Bible never suggests that married couples should sever their ties with their parents, but that they must “let go” of their former lives as sons and daughters in order to cement their relationships as husbands and wives. What “leaving” means is that all lesser relationships must give way to the newly formed marital relationship. A leaving must occur to cement a covenant relationship of husband and wife. This principle of leaving applies likewise to our covenant relationship with God. It is said of the disciples that “they left everything and followed Him” (Luke 5:11).31

Leaving is not always easy. It is often hard for a baby to leave his mother’s womb. It may look cruel to see a doctor cut the umbilical cord which binds the baby to the mother. Yet, it is necessary for the growth and development of the baby. It is also hard for children to leave their parents and for parents to let their children go, for example, to a school away from home. Just as babies cannot grow physically unless they leave their mother’s womb and just as children cannot receive an education unless they leave home to go to school, similarly a marriage cannot mature unless both partners are willing to leave their parents in order to cement a new marital relationship and establish a new family.

Leaving involves ending financial dependence upon parents to stand financially on your own feet to be able to develop your future plans independently. It again involves leaving behind parental authority, since possessive, interfering parents can threaten the best marriages. This does not imply that parental authority ends with marriage or that one ignores, abandon or forsake his or her parents. In Ephesians 6:1, it is made clear that “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right”. Also, in Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother and you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you”. Leaving mean the husband-wife relationship is now the priority relationship.32

Another aspect of leaving is learning to abandon some of our parents’ attitudes and influences. In effect, the first principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is ‘To establish a thrilling “one flesh” marriage covenant, we must be willing toleave all lesser relationships’.33

**2.2.1.2‘Cleaving’ – The second component of the marriage covenant**

The second essential component of a marriage covenant is cleaving: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife” (Gen 2:24). A leaving must occur before a cleaving can take place. This process reveals divine wisdom. A man and a woman must leave all lesser relationships for the purpose of cleaving, that is, cementing their new relationship and establishing a new home.

“Cleaving” reflects the central concept of covenant-fidelity.34 The Hebrew word for “cleave” dabaq, suggests the idea of being permanently glued or joined together. It is one of the words frequently used to express the covenant commitment of the people to God: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and cleave to Him” (Deut 10:20; cf. 11:22; 13:4; 30:20). The word is used to describe Ruth’s refusal to leave her mother-in-law Naomi: “Ruth clave unto her” (Ruth 1:14).

In the sight of God, cleaving means wholehearted commitment which spills over to every area of our being. Cleaving involves unswerving loyalty to one’s marital partner. Note that man is to cleave to “his wife.” This excludes marital unfaithfulness. A man cannot be glued to his wife and flirt or engage in sexual intercourse with another woman. The two are mutually exclusive.35

In a marriage covenant, cleaving does not allow the “freedom to leave” when the relationship is no longer satisfying. If the “freedom to leave” is retained as a real option, it will hinder the total effort to develop a marital relationship characterized by covenant faithfulness. As marriage counselor Ed Wheat observes, “Keeping divorce as an escape clause indicates a flaw in your commitment to each other, even as a tiny crack can be fatally widened by the many forces working to destroy homes and families.”36 It could be summarized that the second principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is: To maintain at thrilling “one flesh” marriage covenant we must be willing to cleave to ourmarital partners, avoiding any thought, word, or action that could weakenour loyalty and commitment to them.37

**2.2.1.3‘Becoming One Flesh’ – The third component of the marriage covenant**

The third essential ingredient of a marriage covenant is that “they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Note the progression: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. As husband and wife leave lesser relationships and learn to cleave to one another, they become a new entity, “one flesh.” The phrase “one flesh” needs some explanation because it is frequently misunderstood to refer primarily to the sexual union. To become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) means to become one functioning unit. Samuelle Bicchocchi quotes H. C. Leupold and explains that becoming one flesh “involves the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits, a union consummated in intercourse.”38

The phrase “one flesh” does also refer to the physical or sexual aspect of marriage. Paul explicitly uses the phrase in this way when speaking of sexual intercourse between a man and a harlot (1 Cor. 6:16). Sexual intercourse per se, however, does not automatically assure that a man and a woman become one in a mystical, emotional, and spiritual unity. Genital intercourse without spiritual communion often leaves people divided, alienated, and bitter toward each other. Thus, sexual intercourse itself does not bring about real oneness.

To achieve the Biblical “one flesh” union, sexual intercourse in marriage must be the natural fruit of love, the crowning act of marital union. If sex is not the expression of genuine love, respect, and commitment, then it offers only a physical contact while keeping the partners mentally and spiritually apart. Sexual desire must become the desire for the total union and oneness of body, soul, and spirit between marital partners.39

Becoming one flesh is a gradual process, as a man and a woman who come together in marriage do not automatically become “one flesh” when they exchange their marriage vows. As they live together as husband and wife, they realize that they must safeguard their individuality while striving to become one. They must not allow their differences to divide them but must learn to accept their differences, viewing them not as antagonistic but as complementary. Their differences contribute to achieving their oneness because they are accepted as being complementary and not contradictory.40

The becoming of “one flesh” is beautifully exemplified in the children of a married couple. In their children, husband and wife are indissolubly united into one person. What happens biologically in children occurs psychologically in a husband/wife relationship as the two gradually become “one flesh,” a new functioning unity.

Becoming “one flesh” also implies continuity. This is why the modern practice of serial monogamy41 must be rejected as immoral: it defeats the Biblical purpose of marriage which is to develop a permanent “one flesh” relationship. The “one flesh” principle excludes polygamy and extra-marital relationships of all kinds, because no man can become “one flesh” with more than one woman. The Old Testament persons who violated the “one flesh” principle by taking more than one wife paid the price for their transgressions. Problems of all kinds developed in their families as their wives became jealous or felt exploited, degraded, or hated. In summary, the third principle derived from the divine institution of marriage recorded in Genesis 2:24 is as follows: To become a “one flesh”functioning unit, husband and wife must learn to accept their differences ascomplementing their oneness and must reserve their sexual expressionsexclusively for each other.42

Marriage is therefore defined by John Stott as “an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving of parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supportive partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children”.43

**2.2.2God’s intention for marriage**

With reference to the components of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24, it can be inferred that God intended marriage to be a permanent union. The man was to leave his parents in order to “be united to his wife, and …become one flesh” with his wife. Jesus himself quoted this same text as the foundational word of God for marriage when He was asked about permissible grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:4 – 5).

In addition, God intended marriage to be monogamous. The divine order of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:18 is monogamy, one man and one woman relationship. There were polygamous marriages in the Old Testament (OT) era. The first case was in Cain’s line (Genesis 4:19) with many OT examples, including some of the patriarchs. But polygamy is never held up to be the ideal. The OT writers indirectly criticize polygamy by showing the resultant strife (for example, Genesis 21:9, 10; 37:2 – 36; 2 Samuel 13 – 18). Passages that idealize marriage normally do so by speaking of one husband and one wife (see Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10 – 29; Ecclesiastes 9:9). Jesus also affirms that God’s ideal from the beginning was monogamy, speaking of “man” and “wife” in the singular, with the “two” becoming one flesh (Matthew 19:5,6). Polygamy was not encouraged in the Early Church.44

As stated by John Stott, “Classical theology has followed the biblical revelation in identifying three main purposes for which God ordained marriage”. The first purpose relates to the command ‘Be fruitful and increase in number’ (Genesis 1:28) indicating, marriage was for the procreation of children with their upbringing within the love and discipline of the family. The second purpose is when God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ (Genesis 2:18). Thus, God intended marriage for companionship - ‘the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other both in prosperity and adversity’. Thirdly, marriage is intended to be that reciprocal commitment of self – giving love which finds its natural expression in sexual union, or becoming ‘one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24).45

These three purposes have been very necessary due to the fall. The loving discipline of family life has become all the more necessary because of the waywardness of children, mutual support because of the sorrows of a broken world, and sexual union because of temptation to immorality. But all three purposes existed before the fall and must be seen as part of God’s loving provision in the institution of marriage.

Finally, marriage is a covenant. It is a solemn binding agreement made first before God and then among people in society. The very first description of the nature of marriage in the Bible, as consisting of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24), reveals the Biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. This meaning of marriage as a covenant of companionship is expressed more explicitly later in Scripture in such passages as Malachi 2:14. This will be discussed under the prophets.

The preceding study of the divine institution of marriage has shown that God intended marriage to be a sacred and permanent covenant. The following section of this chapter considers briefly the teachings of the prophets, of Jesus and of Paul to find out how they viewed marriage and what they said about divorce.

**2.3The teachings of the Prophets**

To help His people understand and accept the unrelenting nature of His covenant of love, in the Old Testament God often used the metaphor of the husband-wife relationship. The obvious reason was that the marriage covenant, characterized by love, compassion, and faithfulness, fittingly exemplified God’s covenant relationship with His people.

**2.3.1Hosea’s marriage**

Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute, Gomer, and raise a family by her. Through this experience, Hosea was to act out God’s unrelenting covenant of love to His people. When Gomer went after her lovers, Hosea was sent to take her back and love her again. Through Hosea’s marital experiences, God revealed Himself to Israel as a compassionate, forgiving husband: “In that day, says the Lord, you will call me; ‘my husband,’ . . . And I will betroth you to come to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (Hos. 2:16, 19-20 ESV). By revealing Himself as a faithful, compassionate and unrelenting husband, God sets a pattern for the husband-wife relationship. What God does on a larger scale as Israel’s husband, a human husband is called to do on a smaller scale in his relationship with his wife.

**2.3.2Later Prophets**

The imagery of the marriage covenant is used by later prophets to remind the people of their covenant relationship with God. For example, Jeremiah reminded the people that God had entered into a covenant with them and had become their husband (Jer. 31:32). Even though they had broken the covenant, God remained a faithful husband who would make a new covenant with His people, working to transform their hearts (Jer. 33:33). The implication is clear. Marriage is a sacred covenant in which the husband and wife must be faithful to their commitment as God is faithful to his promise. Jeremiah’s message was ignored. Eventually Judah was captured by the Babylonians and all her leading citizens were taken into exile. There in exile, Ezekiel graphically portrays God’s unfailing love as that of a husband wooing and winning back an unfaithful wife (Ezek. 16:8, 15, 38, 59).

In a similar vein Isaiah describes the final restoration of Israel in terms of a loving husband forgiving and restoring his unfaithful wife (Is 54:5-8).

The above examples suffice to show how the Old Testament prophets often describe God’s covenant relationship with His people in terms of an ever-loving, faithful husband who never tires of wooing back an unfaithful wife. This example of God as a faithful and loving husband reveals what God intends marriage to be: a sacred covenant where love and faithfulness prevail.

**2.3.3Malachi’s teaching**

Malachi, one of the last Old Testament prophets, fittingly sums up the Old Testament view regarding the sacred and inviolable nature of the marriage covenant. In his time, the Jews were languishing in a ruined Jerusalem and lamenting that God no longer accepted their offerings. Malachi responded by pointing out that the cause of their suffering was found in their unfaithfulness to God manifested especially through their unfaithfulness to their wives:

“You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal 2:13-14 ESV).

Here the Scripture tells us explicitly that marriage is a covenant to which God is a witness. Since God does not break covenants (Lev. 26:40-45), the marriage covenant is all the more binding. This means that what we do to our marital partner we do also to the Lord. Christian commitment and marital commitment are two sides of the same covenant. For this reason, Malachi admonishes the people, saying: “So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. ‘For I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts’” (Mal 2:15-16). God states that He hates divorce, not the divorcée. This implies that Christians should reflect Christ’s attitude of loving concern toward those who have suffered marital disaster (John 4:6-26) while at the same time upholding the Biblical imperative of the sacred and inviolable nature of the marriage covenant. Malachi admonishes the people that in the best interest of their families and communities they should not violate their marriage covenant by divorcing their wives. The reason is that divorce violates not only God’s original plan for marriage but also the marriage covenant to which the Lord is a witness. Divorce betrays life’s most intimate companion and as such is a grievous sin which God hates.

Being a sacred covenant, human marriage serves in the Old and New Testaments as the prism through which God reveals His covenant relationship with His people and Christ with His church.

To appreciate the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant, it is helpful to distinguish between a contract and a covenant. Samuelle Bacchiocchi in “The Marriage Covenant” quotes Paul E. Palmer as offering a helpful clarification of the difference between the two: “Contracts engage the services of people; covenants engage persons. Contracts are made for a stipulated period of time; covenants are forever. Contracts can be broken, with material loss to the contracting parties; covenants cannot be broken, but if violated, they result in personal loss and broken hearts. . . . Contracts are witnessed by people with the state as guarantor; covenants are witnessed by God with God as guarantor.”46

**2.4New Testament teaching on marriage and divorce**

**2.4.1The teachings of Jesus Christ**

In response to the Pharisees’ question regarding the concession of Moses regarding divorce (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:3-5), Christ pointed back to the institution of marriage, saying: “For your hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘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 they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mark 10:5-9 NASB). In this memorable statement Christ appeals to the divine institution of marriage (Gen 2:24) to point out that marriage is the strongest human bond that transforms two people into “one flesh.” Moreover, Jesus affirms that God Himself is the one who actually joins a couple in marriage. This means that when Christian couples exchange their marital vows in the presence of witnesses, they are in actual fact uttering their vows of mutual commitment to God Himself. A man and a woman marry by their own choice; but when they do, God joins them together into one permanent union. It is evident that for Jesus marriage is not a mere civil contract, but a divinely ordained union which God alone has power to establish and to terminate. The full force of this truth was explained by Christ privately to His disciples in these terms: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12). By this statement, Jesus declares unambiguously that the marriage covenant must not be violated by divorce and remarriage because it is a sacred inviolable bond. To do otherwise is to “commit adultery,” a sin clearly condemned by God’s moral law (Ex 20:14; Deut. 5:18). Jesus thus refutes the view that divorce is a viable option for a married couple. The covenant structure of marriage makes divorce an act of covenant breaking, a failure to keep a moral obligation.

The Mosaic provision in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 generated a controversy which was presented to Jesus. In the pre-Mosaic period, divorce was common among the heathen nations. A man could divorce his spouse for any reason simply by telling her before witnesses, “You are no longer my wife.” The divorced wife would have no recourse but to leave her home with only the few

belongings she could carry on her back. This explains why women wore all their rings, jewelry, and coins on their bodies, since these provided a financial resource in the case of divorce.47

The practice of easy divorce became common among the Hebrews, encouraged by the absence of regulations restricting it. “Men were divorcing their wives for a ‘weekend fling’ and then taking them back again when the dirty laundry had piled up and the house needed cleaning.”3 It was thissituation that occasioned the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The chief concern of the law is to discourage hasty divorce by preventing remarriage after divorce. The law contains three elements: (1) the grounds for divorce (Deut 24:1a), (2) the process of divorce (Deut 24:1b), and (3) the result of divorce (Deut 24:2-4).Divorce was not instituted by Moses, nor was it approved as an intrinsic right of the husband. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 indicates that Moses sought to curb the evil of divorce by requiring the husband to give a bill of divorcement to his wife to protect her after her marriage to another man. The Mosaic concession does not alter God’s original plan for marriage to be a sacred, permanent covenant. It simply provides protection for the divorced wife when sinful hearts violate God’s original plan for marriage.48

One significant Matthean contribution is the exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 which teaches that to divorce and to remarry, "except for unchastity [porneia]" is adultery: "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt 5:32 NAS). "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matt 19:9).49

The exception clause found in these two texts has been the object of countless studies. A major reason is that many find in this clause the only legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. Scholarly opinion on the meaning of the exception clause is divided, reflecting the lack of unanimity among scholars about the precise meaning of the key word of the clause, namely porneia. The word is generally translated as "fornication" (KJV), "unchastity" (RSV), and "marital unfaithfulness" (NIV).

The Greek word porneia, from which the word "pornography," is derived, comes from the root word pernemi-"to sell." The originalidea was to offer one's body for a price. The word was used especially of slaves and meant "a harlot for hire." Historically, porneia has been used with wider and narrower meanings. The wider meaning includes unlawful extra-marital intercourse such as prostitution, fornication, and adultery. The narrower meaning can refer to sexual aberrations such as homosexuality (cf. Rom 1:29), incest (cf. 1 Cor 5:1), and unlawful marriages within the forbidden degrees of relationship (Acts 15:20, 29). The question then is what is the exact meaning of porneia in the exception clause (Matt 5:32; 19:9)? Is Jesus using the term in its wider or narrower meaning?

It is important to do an overview of the different views which cause the debate over the meaning of the Matthean exception clauses. The popular view held by most contemporary evangelical scholars is described quite often as “the majority view (also known as the Erasmian or Protestant view) interprets porneia as a reference to adultery.”50

Basically, the view sees the word applying to any sexual immorality with anyone outside of a person’s spouse. Spurgeon assumes that the wordis synonymous with “infidelity to the marriage vow,” mainly adultery. He states that one “who commits adultery does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the state as being sundered.”51 Janzen would describe this view by defining porneia as “intercourse with someone other than her husband on the part of the woman during betrothal or marriage.”52 Jones agrees saying that the exception for marriage includes “nothing but adultery,”53

Vernon Mcgee would concur wholeheartedly saying that “unfaithfulness” or “immorality” is the only grounds for a biblical divorce.54 Yet many hold to a specific betrothal view of the passages. Proponents of this view take a holistic view of the use of porneia throughout the Gospel of Matthew. As David Jones says: “it is not just the proximate context of the exception clause that gives the word porneia its meaning, but rather the milieu of the entire Book of Matthew.”55

This is the critical aspect of the betrothal view which must be understood. Those who hold this view are simply trying to understand the meaning of the word based upon its usage in the book of Matthew. They believe, as Guenther points out, that “In both our Matthean texts, the scope of porneia must be narrower than that of moicheia (adultery).”56

David Jones sums up the betrothal view: betrothal view advocates point out that nearly every Christian view of divorce and remarriage limits the meaning of porneia in some sense...the question is not whether to limit the meaning of porneia but rather how to limit its meaning.57 But does the betrothal view limit the meaning of porneia to an unnecessary strict sense? Mahoney says that such views of the exception clauses “are so construed as to remove the grounds for a real divorce in Christ’s teaching.”58

The majority view seems to suggest that, as Charles C. Ryrie points out, “the weakness [of the betrothal view] lies in the technical meaning given to porneia.”59

They would say that this technical meaning is not supported by any context of the Greek word. There are several variations to these two opposing views, but none are held so commonly as to deserve attention. This paper explains the support for both of these views trying to come to the proper interpretation of the passage and the correct meaning of Porneia so as to understand the biblical teaching of Christ on divorce.

it is important to realize that it is broadly used and understood to mean: the general term for all illicit or immoral sexual intercourse. The specific form may sometimes be indicated by the context. If payment of wages is involved, it is prostitution. If it involves close relatives, it is incest. If it involves persons of the same sex, it is homosexuality. It if involves an unmarried couple, it is unchastity. If it involves a married person outside of marriage, it is adultery.60

Jesus’ use of the word porneia may be somewhat specific in the Matthean contexts, but the word’s nature itself does not indicate any precise meaning. It definitely applies to some kind of “sexual unfaithfulness,”26 but to establish what this may be definitively requires several other influences and characteristics of the word to be explored. Porneia’s meaning will depend crucially on the specific Matthean contexts, which will be explored after some broader contexts. All that can be firmly stated at this point is to say that porneia is a serious sexual sin which seems to make divorce permissible through the dissolving of the marriage bond. Both the

betrothal view and the majority view fall into the broader lexical definition of the word but the context, will determine the actual usage in Matthew 5 and 19.61

**2.4.2Paul’s teaching**

Following the teaching of Jesus, Paul affirms in different words that marriage is a lifelong and indissoluble covenant. In Romans 7:1-3, Paul sets forth the principle that death ends the dominion of the law and then illustrates the principle through the marriage relationship. The point of the illustration is that death and death alone releases a person from the bond of marriage: “For example a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.” (Rom 7:2-3 NASB). Paul’s illustration sheds light on his view of marriage as a lifelong covenant which can be terminated only by death. The same teaching is presented by Paul again in 1 Corinthians 7:39 where he declares: “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.”

Paul writes, “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10–11 ESV). In giving this command, Paul refers to Jesus’ own instructions regarding divorce and remarriage (see Matthew 5:32; 19:3–12). While Paul rarely appeals directly to the teaching of Jesus, this qualification notes that Paul’s command in verses 10–11 is equivalent to what Jesus himself taught (unlike verses 12–16, which did not originate from Jesus’ own words).62 Because Paul does not attempt to quote Jesus verbatim, there appears to be an assumed familiarity among the Corinthians with the content of the Lord’s original teaching.63

Citing the command of Jesus, Paul charges the wife not to separate from her husband and commands the husband not to divorce his wife. The verb “to separate” (χωρίζω) is defined as “to separate by departing from someone”64 while the verb “to divorce” (ἀφίημι) means, “to dismiss or release someone or something from a place or one’s presence; in a legal sense, divorce.”65 These two verbs are repeated throughout 1 Corinthians 7:10–16. Notably, these two verbs are synonyms and are likely the result of stylistic variation.66 In Greco-Roman society, the very act of separation was considered to be a divorce, though one without legal documentation.67 This type of “divorce by separation” was common for the era.68 Thus, interpreters should not place too much emphasis on the semantic difference between these two verbs.69 In fact, if the woman were merely separating physically, i.e., not divorcing her spouse, then Paul would not have needed to instruct the separated wife to remain single—she would have been legally unable to remarry. However, because “to separate” and “to divorce” are synonymous for Paul, he is directly charging the woman not to divorce her husband. Thus, the apostle does not prohibit the modern idea of the temporary, physical separation as part of an ongoing attempt for marital reconciliation; he prohibits the wife from legally divorcing her husband.

Paul continues in verse 11, instructing that if a Christian wife does divorce her husband, she ought to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her spouse. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner contend that Paul gives the wife two options because, as in Mark 10:11–12, “divorcing one’s partner is judged to be a legalized form of adultery.”70 However, David Garland argues that, rather than presenting the wife with two options, Paul “directs her to remain unmarried in order to be reconciled with her husband.”71 Regardless of the potential nuance of the options, the better option must be reconciliation. However, when the option for marital reconciliation becomes impossible, e.g., via the husband’s own remarriage, Paul’s injunction appears to stand: the divorcing wife is to remain unmarried. Today, there is two years separation as a prelude to divorce. It is to enable the couple reconsider their request for divorce and possibly withdraw the application and re-unite.

In verses 10–11, Paul addresses first the wife and then the husband; Ciampa and Rosner argue this ordering suggests that wives were instigating the divorces in the Corinthian church, perhaps as an application of the celibate asceticism addressed in verse 1.72 Regardless, Paul addresses the husband with the same command as the wife: do not divorce your spouse. Fee avers that Paul’s lack of an explicit exception for the husband further suggests that the problem lay with the women of Corinth; however, Fee concludes, “What is said of the wife would apply to the husband as well.”73 Thus, Paul charges the married Christian not to divorce her (or his) spouse; if the Christian disobeys even this admonition, Paul exhorts her to remain unmarried or else remarry her wronged spouse.

In their analysis of these verses, Wenham and Heth—who conclude Scripture permits no remarriage after any divorce—interpret that Paul “permitted only two courses of action after anydivorce: remain single/unmarried or be reconciled.”74 However, their view fails to recognize that Paul is speaking here only to Christians who initiate a divorce; he offers no command in verses 10–11 to Christians receiving a divorce. Others, such as John Murray and William Luck prefer to read Paul’s exception-less command as one with implied exceptions inMatthew 19:9.75 However, this view demotes the perspicuity of Mark 10:11–12, which states that a Christian should not divorce his or her spouse (without exception). Indeed, Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 accords more directly with Jesus’ address in Mark 10:11–12 than Matthew’s rendition in 19:9. Thus, Paul charges Christians, without any stated exception, to stay married and not to divorce their spouses. If they fail to do that, Paul exhorts them to remain unmarried or else be reconciled.

The covenantal nature of the marriage relationship is expressed by Paul again in Ephesians 5:31- 32 where he uses the marriage union to illustrate the covenant relationship between Christ and His bride, the church: “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.’ This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church.” Just as the prophets in the Old Testament used the marriage covenant to portray the relationship between God and Israel, so Paul in the New Testament uses the marriage union to represent Christ’s covenant of sacrificial love and oneness with the church. Since the marriage covenant represents the permanent relationship between Christ and His church, it must be permanent; otherwise it would be an inaccurate representation of the indissoluble relationship between Christ and His church. The use of marriage in the Old and New Testaments to reveal God’s covenant relationship with His people serves also to demonstrate what marriage today should be like. This may be called “reciprocal illumination.” By revealing through human marriage His covenant of salvation, God simultaneously revealed the unique meaning of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant.

**2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the Biblical background to the issues of marriage and divorce. The teachings of Genesis, the prophets, Jesus and Paul regarding marriage, have shown how the Scripture consistently upholds marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and protected by God. It has been observed that marriage as a sacred covenant was effectively used in the Old Testament to portray God’s relationship with Israel and in the New Testament to represent Christ’s relationship with His church. If God used marriage as a metaphor to represent His commitment to His people, He must surely have thought of it as a sacred, permanent covenant. The recovery of the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself, is indispensable in counteracting the secularization of marriage. This trend has influenced many Christians to view marriage as a temporary social contract governed by civil laws, rather than as a permanent covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself. To counteract this trend, it is essential for Christians to recover and accept the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant. In the following chapter, the current rate of divorce in Christian marriages within the Kumasi metropolis, and the issue of marriage and divorce as it pertains in the selected church would be reviewed.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.0 Introduction:**

 This chapter therefore, focused on research methodology and techniques used and also on the justification of such methods and techniques in the study

**3.1 Research Design**

A research of this kind demands that the research methods/procedures must be reluctant and acceptable to the study. This becomes important since the bending of the research depends on the quality of information or data collected. The descriptive research method was used in this research work.

**3.2 The area of the study**

Established in 2011, Alex Ekwueme Federal University is a publicly funded, non-profit institution of higher education situated in the municipality of Ikwo, Ebonyi, which has a population ranging from 50,000 to 249,999. Alex Ekwueme Federal University (FUNAI), a coeducational Nigerian higher education institution, is officially recognised by the National Universities Commission of Nigeria. With a uniRank enrollment range of 10,000-14,999 students, FUNAI is a large institution. In a variety of academic disciplines, Alex Ekwueme Federal University (FUNAI) provides courses and programmes that culminate in degrees of higher education that are officially recognised, including pre-bachelor's degrees (i.e. certificates, diplomas, associate or foundation degrees) and bachelor's degrees. The degree levels and fields of study listed in the table below by UniRank provide additional information. The admission policy of this 13-year-old Nigerian institution of higher education is selective and is determined by entrance exams. In addition to academic and non-academic services and facilities, FUNAI provides students with a library and administrative support.

**3.3    Population of the study**

This is the total number of aggregates of all peoples which by virtues of common characteristics may be defined as belonging to the same population. AE-FUNAI has between 10,000-14,999 students.

**3.4. Sample size and sampling techniques**

This study adopts the convenience sampling method to select a total of 401 students who participated in the study.

**3.5. Validity of instruments**

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to be measuring. The study uses content validity which is usually determined by expert judgement, most often by logical and rational analysis. This was done by sending the prepared research instrument to experts who then vetted the items in terms of relevance to the subject matter, courage of the content areas, appropriate language usage and clarity of purpose.

**3.6 Reliability of instruments**

Checking the validity of the measures go hand in hand with determining the reliability of the research instruments the test is said to be reliable to the degree that it measures accurately and consistently, yielding comparative results when administered a number of times. The researcher used test-retest method. In the test-retest method the instrument is applied more than once on the same person or group after interval of one week and the same answer was received which made the data gathered reliable for the study.

**3.7 Methods of data collection**

Data for this study was gotten from both quantitative methods. Questionnaire was utilized as instrument for quantitative, while in-depth interview was used for qualitative .The questionnaire focuses on the Christian students perception on divorce. Descriptive analysis was carried out on the quantitative data using social science statistical package to obtain the frequency and percentages. Qualitative data was transcribed verbatim to complement the qualitative data.

**3.8   Method of data analysis**

The researcher will use statistical methods of frequency table and percentage to present, analyse and interpret all the data collected for the study. Also discussion of results and findings will be presented.

**Measures**

**Divorce opinions**

Christian students Opinions about divorce were measured using Hardy’s ([1957](#_bookmark19)) Divorce Opinionaire scale, which included 12 items such as “Divorce is a sensible solution to many unhappy marriages,” and “Divorce is one of our greatest social evils,” to assess participants’ views on divorce. Responses were measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and six of the items were reverse-coded so that greater scores indicated more favorable opinions about divorce. This scale produced an alpha reliability of .86 in this study.

**Closeness with parents**

Participants’ closeness to their parents was measured with Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch’s ([1991](#_bookmark12)) Closeness to Parents Scale, which included 10 items such as the following: “How interested is your mother in the things you do?” and “How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your mother?” Participants completed the measure once for their mother and once for their father with responses ranging from 1 (none at all) to 5 (a great deal). One item was recoded so that higher scores indicated greater parent–child closeness. This scale produced an alpha reliability of .91 for mothers and .92 for fathers in this study.

**Marital attitudes**

Participants’ attitudes about marriage were assessed using Braaten and zosen’s ([1998](#_bookmark11)) Marital Attitude Scale containing 23 items measuring attitudes about marriage, including the possible success of marriages, doubts or cautions about marriage, and the possibility of that marriage failing or becoming unhappy. Some of the items are “People should marry,”“Marriage is a sacred act,” and “My lifelong dream includes a happy marriage.” Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Eight items were reverse-coded so that higher scores indicated more positive attitudes toward marriage. This scale produced an alpha reliability of .90 in this study.

**Ideas about marriage**

Ideas about marriage were measured using two combined scales: Park and Rosén’s ([2013](#_bookmark29)) Intent to Marry Scale (three items: “I intend to get married someday,” “I want to marry,” and a reverse-coded item, “I do not hope to marry”) as well as their General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (nine items, including “Marriage is beneficial” and “Marriage makes people happy”). Four items from this scale were recoded. Responses for the 12 total items ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores on these two combined measures indicated more favorable ideas about marriage. This scale produced an alpha reliability of .90 in this study.

**Relationship expectations**

To assess the participants’ relationship expectations, Sprecher and Metts’s ([1989](#_bookmark34)) 15-item Romantic Beliefs Scale was used. Items including “I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise,” and “I’m sure that every new thing I learn about the person I choose for a long-term commitment will please me,” were measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). One item was reverse-coded so that higher scores indicated increased relationship expectations about romanticism (e.g., that love overcomes all obstacles or the idea of one true love). This scale produced an alpha reliability of .88 in this study.

**Religiosity**

Participants’ religiosity was assessed using Koenig and Bussings’s ([2010](#_bookmark22)) Duke University Religion Index (DUREL), designed to assess both organized and nonorganized religious activity as well as one’s intrinsic religious views. Five items assessed how often respondents attend church or religious meet- ings, the degree to which religion dictates their approach to life, and their experience of the Divine. The first two questions (i.e., “How often do you attend church or other religious meetings?” and “How often do you spend time in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study?”) range from 1 (rarely/never) to 6 (more than once a day/week). The final three questions (i.e., “In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e., God),” “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life,” and “I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in my life”) ranged from 1 (definitely not true) to 5 (definitely true of me). Higher scores indicate greater degrees of religiosity. “The DUREL has been used in over 100 published studies conducted throughout the world and is available in 10 languages” (Koenig & Bussing, [2010](#_bookmark22), p. 78). This scale produced an alpha reliability of .88 in this study.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS**

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables are presented in [Table 1](#_bookmark3). In assessing the differences between Christians from divorced and still married families and their perceived closeness to their parents, an independent samples t test indicated that these groups differed significantly in reported closeness to their fathers but not to mothers, t(174.21) = 4.63, p < .001. Specifically, children of divorce reported less closeness with their fathers (M = 3.19, SD = 1.13) compared to children from married families (M = 3.74, SD = .84). When analyzed further, another independent samples t test revealed that there were no significant differences in gender and parental closeness with fathers or mothers in divorced families.

To investigate the associations of parental closeness further, bivariate correlations were run for both mother and father perceived closeness. Closeness with fathers shared a positive association with relationship expectations (r = .11, p < .05), as well as a positive association with ideas about marriage (r = .24, p < .01), and marital attitudes (r = .32, p < .01). Next, closeness with mothers shared a positive association with children’s relation- ship expectations (r = .13, p < .05), with ideas on marriage (r = .43, p < .01), and with marital attitudes (r = .41, p < .01).

To more closely examine opinions about divorce, an independent samples t test showed that Christians from divorced and still married homes differed significantly, t(376) = 2.51, p < .05. Specifically, Christians from divorced families rated their divorce opinions higher (i.e., they were more comfortable with the idea of divorce; M = 4.46, SD = .90) than did children from married families (M = 4.20, SD = .93). Bivariate correlations revealed that favorable opinions about divorce were inversely related to relationship expectations

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson’s Product–Moment Correlations for All Variables (N = 401).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 7 |
| 1. Closeness father | 3.57 | .97 | — |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Closeness mother | 3.89 | .85 | .36\*\* | — |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Relationship expectations | 4.83 | .95 | .11\* | .13\* | — |  |  |  |
| 4. Ideas about marriage | 3.94 | .69 | .24\*\* | .43\*\* | .30\*\* | — |  |  |
| 5. Marital attitudes | 4.86 | .85 | .32\*\* | .41\*\* | .27\*\* | .87\*\* | — |  |
| 6. Divorce opinions | 4.28 | .92 | −.12\* | −.08 | −.23\*\* | −.27\*\* | −.34\*\* | — |
| 7. Religiosity | 2.98 | 1.12 | .23\*\* | .28\*\* | .14\*\* | .37\*\* | .42\*\* | −.42\*\* — |

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. (r = –.23, p < .01), ideas about marriage (r = –.27, p < .01), and marital attitudes (r = –.34, p < .01).

To explore differences between Christians from still married and divorced homes regarding their positive posture toward marriage, an independent samples t test indicated significant differences, t(369) = 3.05, p < .01. Specifically, Christians of divorce rated their ideas on marriage lower (M = 3.77, SD = .68) than did Christians from married families (M = 4.01, SD = .69). There were also significant differences in their attitudes toward marriage, t(345) = 2.93, p < .01. Specifically, Christians from married families rated their marital attitudes higher (M = 4.95, SD = .84) than did Christians from divorced families (M = 4.66, SD = .82). Bivariate correlations indicated that favorable ideas toward marriage were positively associated with relation- ship expectations (r = .30, p < .01) and positive attitudes about marriage were also positively related to relationship expectations (r = .27, p < .01).

Finally, we were interested in the relationship of religion with the afore- mentioned associations. Thus, an independent samples t test revealed significant differences in Christianity between Christians from married and divorced homes, t(379) = 2.31, p < .05. Specifically, Christians from married families rated their religiosity higher (M = 3.07, SD = 1.13) than did Christians from divorced families (M = 2.78, SD = 1.08). Although Christianity was only slightly correlated with participants’ increased media consumption (r = .15, p < .01), further bivariate correlations revealed that Christianity was positively related to relationship expectations (r = .14, p < .01), positive ideas about marriage (r = .37, p < .01), and favorable attitudes toward marriage (r = .42, p < .01), and inversely related to favorable opinions about divorce (r = –.42, p < .01).

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine specific factors related to emergent adults’ views regarding parent–child closeness, views on marriage and divorce, and Christianity. In addition, this study examined the differences between children from divorced and still married families. Several implications are worth noting as well as theoretical and practical advances considered.

**Parent–child closeness**

First, emergent adults from divorced families report feeling less close with their fathers than their counterparts from still married families, but there are no significant differences between sons and daughters in the closeness they reported with parents in these divorced families. Researchers have previously noted that children of divorce commonly report feeling distant with their fathers, often because of mothers’ negative talk about fathers’ participation in their family (Rosenberg & Guttmann, [2001](#_bookmark32)). Following a divorce, the majority of children in Western culture reside primarily with their mothers, creating a space wherein children often have decreased contact with their fathers. Additionally, children often rely heavily on financial resources from their fathers as they transition into young adulthood, so that a distressed relationship might hurt children not just emotionally, but also socioeconomically (Kalmijn, [2015](#_bookmark20)). Scholars have found that fathers’ involvement with their children prior to the divorce greatly affects the parent–child relationship after the divorce. Fathers who maintained weaker parent–child bonds during their marriage saw a downward spiral in the relation- ship with their children following the divorce, often because they were given fewer visitation and custody rights (Kalmijn, [2015](#_bookmark20)).

This could create implications for young adults with strained parent–child relationships, as results from this study indicated that parental closeness (especially closeness with mothers) is positively associated with favorable ideas and attitudes about marriage and relationship expectations. Specifically, this is exemplified through feeling hopeful about getting married and the continued success of that marriage one day, that marriage provides happiness and companionship, and that love can overcome many obstacles in a relationship. Thus, positive expectations and hopes about relationships and one day, marriage, are strengthened and reinforced by a close parent–child bond for emergent adults. Finally, our findings demonstrated that marital status was not associated with differences in mother–child closeness. This supports previous research, which shows that adult children generally report a closer relationship with mothers than fathers (e.g., Gillespie & Treas, [2017](#_bookmark17)). Children, even as they are entering young adult- hood, often rely on mothers for emotional support and guidance. When it comes to the creation or maintenance of positive relational expectations about dating and marriage, perhaps emergent adults find it easier to discuss these issues with their mothers and potentially receive more support upon doing so.

These findings underscore Minuchin’s ([1985](#_bookmark25), [1988](#_bookmark26)) work with family systems theory in that patterns within the family are not only maintained over time, but regulate members’ behaviors. In other words, patterns of parent–child closeness might not only dictate family life for emergent adult children within their nuclear families, but might also influence the closeness these children anticipate or expect within their own families one day.

**Views on marriage and divorce**

Results also showed that Christians of divorce were slightly more comfortable with the idea of divorce than emergent adults from still married families. Perhaps having endured their parents’ divorce, these emergent adults find divorce more acceptable. Although scholars have long agreed about transmission of divorce through generations (Amato, [1996](#_bookmark5)), results of this study go a step further in highlighting important viewpoints that Christians of divorce might have before entering into their own marriages. According to family systems theory, all members of a system must participate in reorganization, even if those changes do not result from the needs of that member (Minuchin, [1985](#_bookmark25)). When children of divorce undergo the reorganizing of their family system, it stands to reason that experiencing the divorce of one’s parents might be related to a less idealistic view of marriage.

Erola, Härkönen, and Dronkers ([2012](#_bookmark15)) noted that historically there have been mixed results concerning parental divorce and negative views about marriage. This study would suggest that having divorced parents as well as feeling that divorce is acceptable is related to decreased positive feelings about marriage as well as fewer relationship expectations. Therefore, perhaps not only is parental divorce related to offspring’s negative views of marriage, but their views of divorce as being an acceptable option might also play a role in predicting less favorable conceptions of marriage. For those who choose to marry, Christians from divorced homes might use their wariness of marriage to simply be more selective with potential mates (Erola et al., [2012](#_bookmark15)).

**Christianity**

Christianity was investigated as an additional variable in determining how depictions of divorce are related to attitudes about relationships and marriage. Results identified a significant difference in religiosity for Christians of married parents versus divorced parents. Furthermore, religiosity was positively related to relationship expectations. It cannot be determined from these findings, though, if religiosity of the family differed pre- or postdivorce, but the participants surveyed indicated that those from married families reported greater religiosity than children of divorced families. Both Zhai et al. ([2007](#_bookmark38)) and Regnerus and Uecker ([2006](#_bookmark31)) found that religious attendance declined after parental divorce. As adults, children of divorce were less likely to consider themselves to be religious than children of married parents (Zhai, Ellison, Stokes, & Glenn, [2008](#_bookmark39)). In contrast, previous research has found that single parents might maintain a connection or initiate religious attendance after a divorce as a means of receiving social support (Wilcox & Wolfinger, [2008](#_bookmark37)). Although this study is consistent with other research analyzing religiosity (Zhai et al., [2007](#_bookmark38)), future research might benefit from samples with greater diversity with regard to religious affiliation and analyze differences in the level of investment in religion.

Theoretically, these findings support family systems theory (Minuchin, [1988](#_bookmark26)) in that parents’ decisions affect not only the immediate relationship, but are also associated with ripple effects that could be felt for quite some time in the lives of their children. For instance, parents who divorce might unintentionally pave the way for their children to feel more comfortable with a divorce themselves one day, creating a lineage of divorce. Additionally, the bond that parents share with their children serves not only an interpersonal function within the family, but also serves to reinforce children’s perceptions and hopes about their own romantic relationships. It is possible that children who do not feel they can maintain a harmonious or loving bond with their parent could either doubt their ability to carry out that kind of relationship with a romantic partner one day or instead doubt that another person would want to develop a closeness with them. As Galvin, Dickson, and Marrow ([2006](#_bookmark16)) noted, the family is an interdependent system in which each action triggers a response and new behavior, rendering an ongoing interactive pattern among members.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**Conclusion**

Results of this study also provide practical implications. Therapists and counselors should focus on helping emergent adults separate their views on marriage and relationships from those of their experiences within their own families, and perhaps identify ways to increase the parent–child bond, especially in divorced families. Additionally, campus religious groups and clubs should aim to integrate a holistic approach with emergent adult college students in which they discuss implications of students’ family life (i.e., growing up in a divorced or married home) on beliefs about their future romantic intentions and expectations. Because the data collected were cross-sectional in nature, results should be interpreted with caution. Future researchers investigating this topic should aim to conduct in-depth interviews to garner more insight into how young adult Christians form opinions about marriage and divorce and to better understand specific instances from their parents’ relationship that might have shaped their thoughts about romantic relationships. It is also important to consider the age of participants at the time of their parents’ divorce and to investigate any potential effects. It is possible that children whose parents divorced when they were very young might not remember as much about their family system reorganizing as children who were older and understood more of the divorce process. It would also be helpful to ascertain the living situation following the divorce (e.g., who the primary caretaker was and possible remarriages) to assess different outcomes. Finally, although this study was focused on potential challenges associated with parents’ divorce, research is still needed to examine familial factors that foster resilience in emergent adults of divorced families.

**Recommendation**

Future research on the type of religious attendance, consistency of membership, and institutional views on divorce should be examined to gauge their impact on beliefs regarding marriage and divorce. Additionally, open-ended questions would help to assess the specific programming that participants find most influential regarding ideologies on marriage and divorce. Despite these limitations, findings from this study revealed a host of specific factors that contribute to young adults’ views on marriage and divorce, highlighting links in the parent–child relationship and religiosity with their ideas and attitudes toward marriage and divorce.

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**QUESTIONNIARE**

**Knowledge and Perception of Divorce Among Christian Faithful Questionnaire**

This questionnaire aims to gather insights into various aspects of how divorce is perceived and experienced within Christian communities, focusing on its impact on parent-child relationships, views on marriage and divorce, the role of Christian teachings, personal experiences, and suggestions for support within the church.

1. Demographic Information:

 - Age:

 - Gender:

 - Denomination (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox):

 - How many years have you been practicing Christianity?

2. Impact of Divorce on Parent-Child Closeness:

 a. Do you believe that divorce negatively affects the relationship between parents and their children?

 - Yes

 - No

 b. Have you observed changes in parent-child closeness in families where divorce has occurred?

 - Yes

 - No

 c. How would you rate the level of closeness between parents and children in divorced families compared to non-divorced families?

 - Very Close

 - Close

 - Neutral

 - Less Close

 - Not Close at All

3. Views on Marriage and Divorce:

 a. What is your general stance on divorce within Christian marriages?

 - Acceptable under certain circumstances

 - Never acceptable

 - Acceptable in all cases

 b. How do you think the church should support couples going through marital challenges?

 - Counseling and mediation

 - Encouraging reconciliation

 - Allowing for divorce and remarriage

 - Other (please specify)

 c. Do you believe that divorce rates are influenced by cultural factors or individual beliefs within Christian communities?

 - Cultural factors

 - Individual beliefs

 - Both

 - Neither

4. Role of Christianity in Shaping Perceptions of Divorce:

 a. To what extent do you think Christian teachings influence attitudes towards divorce among believers?

 - Strongly Influence

 - Somewhat Influence

 - Neutral

 - Minimally Influence

 - Do Not Influence

 b. How do you think Christian leaders should address divorce-related issues within congregations?

 - Preach against divorce

 - Provide support and guidance for couples

 - Promote forgiveness and reconciliation

 - Allow for diversity of views

 - Other (please specify)

5. Personal Experiences and Perspectives:

 a. Have you personally experienced divorce or witnessed its effects on family members or close friends?

 - Yes

 - No

 b. How has your Christian faith influenced your views and responses towards divorce?

 - Strongly influenced

 - Somewhat influenced

 - Neutral

 - Minimally influenced

 - Not influenced

6. Additional Comments or Suggestions:

 Is there anything else you would like to share or suggest regarding the perception of divorce among Christian faithful?

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