

Essay #4

**Promoting Christian Marriage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Anthony Phiri**  
**Zambia**

---

**Definition of Marriage**

Marriage is an institution established by God the Creator for mankind as part of life in this world. It is a long-lasting, faithful, fruitful relationship between one man and one woman as they live on earth. The opportunity for men and women, in general, to recognize the other gender as a complementary partner in life remains evident in God's love for mankind. The opportunity for a particular man and woman to enjoy each other in a special, one-flesh integration of lives is a gift of love from the Creator. Marriage is a union that God brought about. Marriage was instituted before the first proclamation of the gospel (Genesis 3:15). It concerns itself with temporal relationships. It was not instituted in the interest of the sinners' eternal salvation. The blessings promised through marriage are purely temporal (Matthew 22:30).<sup>1</sup>

**Marriage is God's Plan**

From the beginning, marriage was God's idea. It was not man's idea. Marriage was planned by God to meet the human need for companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help, and sexual satisfaction (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 7:2-3). It was God's plan that children should be born and raised in the security and love created by one man and one woman in a marriage committed to each other for a lifetime (Psalm 127:3; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:6).<sup>2</sup>

When God created Adam in the Garden of Eden, he created a perfect man. But there was one thing Adam was lacking. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). God decided to make a perfect partner for Adam. Adam needed the companionship of another human being. God had made the other creatures male and female (Genesis 6:19). Since Adam was a male, God took one of Adam's ribs and made a female partner for him. By doing this, God gave Adam a lifelong companion and helper and a sexual partner for marriage. Through the physical union of Adam and Eve, God planned for the human race to be continued (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24).

**Marriage Was the First Institution in Human Society**

---

<sup>1</sup> Schuetze and Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ*, 268.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy Idigu. "Does Your Man Look Over the Fence? Find Out." [reachyouthafrica.com/sex-dating-and-marriage](http://reachyouthafrica.com/sex-dating-and-marriage)

Marriage was established by God before all other human institutions. This shows us that marriage is the first foundation of human society. Marriage was established before man's fall into sin. This shows us that marriage is holy. God is pleased with marriage.<sup>3</sup> The miracle by which Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) shows us that God wants people to enjoy marriage to the full. He wants men and women to experience love and acceptance and to be complete.<sup>4</sup> Marriage was made for this purpose.<sup>5</sup>

In God's plan, marriage is the basis for a morally and socially stable society. This is part of the reason why God hates adultery (Exodus 20:14), sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6), incest (Leviticus 18:6), and homosexuality (Romans 1:24-28). These things disrupt and twist God's plan for a stable human society.<sup>6</sup> The Bible warns us, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4).

Part of the reason why many societies today are morally and socially unstable is that people have determined to live without regard for God's laws. Unfortunately, there are severe consequences for sexual sins. The great increase in broken homes caused by divorce and the worldwide epidemic of AIDS are just two of these consequences.<sup>7</sup>

Marriage is God's plan for all people and all cultures in the world (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9). The family cannot be replaced by any other institution in God's plan for mankind. If someone corrupts family life, he is interfering with God's plan for the whole human race. It was God who performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:21-25).<sup>8</sup> It is people who have spoiled marriage through their immorality and unfaithfulness.

## Aspects of Marriage

God gave marriage as a gift to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24). They were created perfectly for each other. Marriage was not just for convenience, nor was it brought about by any culture. It was instituted by God and has three basic aspects: (1) The man leaves his parents and in a public act promises himself to his wife. (2) The man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for each other's welfare and by loving the mate above all others. (3) The two are united into one in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage. Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> "Family Concerns and Related Issues." sithri.blogspot.com/2017/06

<sup>4</sup> GoodFriday N. Aghawenu, "Family Life and Single Parenthood: A Moral Assessment," *International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development* 7(3) (2019): 45.

<sup>5</sup> Aghawenu, "Family Life," 45.

<sup>6</sup> Aghawenu, "Family Life," 45.

<sup>7</sup> Longil Ayuba Dachal "Understanding the Biblical Concept of Marriage as a Remedy for the Rampant Break-Down of Christian Marriage in Contemporary Nigerian Society." grin.com/document/344357

<sup>8</sup> Aghawenu, "Family Life," 45.

<sup>9</sup> Derrick Colton, "On Marriage." panaceaministry.org/151

## **God's Design for Marriage**

God planned that there should be one woman for one man. God made one woman for the man he created (Genesis 2:22-24). He intended this partnership between one man and one woman to last for a lifetime. In Matthew 19:5-6, Jesus said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ... Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."

This lifetime commitment is important for several reasons. First, it assures care, provision, and protection for the wife throughout her life (Colossians 3:12-13; 1 Peter 3:7). Secondly, there is a need for the emotional security and development of the children. Children need a secure and stable environment if they are to grow and develop the way God intended. When parents separate or get a divorce, children feel great emotional pain. Part of God's purpose in establishing marriage was to provide an emotionally stable and loving home environment in which to raise godly children. Malachi 2:15 says, "Has not the LORD made them one? ... And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

Another reason why God planned one woman for one man for a lifetime has to do with a woman's need for emotional security. A woman needs to know that she is the only woman her husband truly loves. A woman's emotional needs cannot be properly met in a polygamous home. When a man has more than one wife, there will always be jealousy and resentment between his wives. Men and women are equal before God (Galatians 3:28). It is just as important for the husband to meet his wife's emotional needs as for the wife to meet her husband's physical needs.

## **God's Plan for Unity in Marriage**

In God's plan, marriage involves a threefold unity between a man and a woman. This threefold unity corresponds to the threefold nature of human beings in body, mind, and spirit.

### **Physical Unity**

The first kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is the physical relationship of sexual oneness. When God brought the woman to the man, in the beginning, they were both naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). The Lord said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The Bible teaches that the physical union of marriage is good and holy in God's sight (Genesis 1:27-28, 31; Proverbs 5:18-19; Hebrews 13:4).

Children are born out of the physical unity of marriage, and mutual responsibility for the home is established. The husband is responsible to work to provide for the family (Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19). The wife is responsible to bear the children and to care for the home (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:5).

### **Mental and Emotional Unity**

The second kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is mental and emotional unity. Mental and emotional unity comes when two people live in harmony and agreement. To find this unity, the husband and wife must have at least some common values, common goals, and common interests in life. The birth of children helps to produce these common values, goals, and interests. Having the same culture and language encourages mental and emotional unity. It is this kind of unity which meets people's need for companionship, acceptance, and value as human beings.

### **Spiritual Unity**

The third kind of unity in God's plan for marriage is spiritual unity. This is the unity created when both the husband and the wife are Christians and both of them want to follow the Lord. God wants spiritual unity in marriage. The strongest expression of spiritual unity is when the husband and wife study the Scriptures and pray together. Spiritual unity brings great peace and blessings to a marriage. It will give the family the peace which comes when Christ is the center of the home (John 14:27). It will also enable the family to be a strong witness for Christ. God wants Christian couples to pray together. The Bible says, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

### **Blessings of Marriage**

God instituted marriage for the happiness and good of the people he created. Through marriage, God gives a man and woman great blessings. Its three blessings are: (1) Companionship, (2) Sexual life pleasing to God, and (3) Children.

### **Companionship**

God created people with the desire to be with other people. People are not doing the natural thing if they try to live alone, away from all other people. It is natural to seek companionship for life. The first man, Adam, also needed companionship. He could not find a proper companion for himself from among the animals, so we read in the Bible, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). God made Eve out of the rib of Adam and brought her to Adam so that the two would have suitable companionship. Eve was a helper, who in every way corresponded to man, agreeing with him mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Hence in marriage God brings two people together so that they may have companionship. God answers one of man's basic needs. A man and woman who come together in marriage are each blessed with a close companion to love and live with until God dissolves that union.

### **Sexual Life Pleasing to God**

God created human beings with a strong desire to have sexual companionship. The force of this desire makes it difficult for human beings to remain pure without marriage. To avoid unholy living, God commands marriage so that everyone will be kept pure. Sexual intercourse practiced within marriage is proper and pleasing to God. When it is practiced outside of marriage, it

becomes a sin against God's Sixth Commandment. The apostle Paul sounded a warning to those who were unmarried in the Corinthian congregation, "It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

Young Christians in the church should watch out for this temptation. The devil seeks to lead people to live unholy lives. The apostle Paul writes: "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2).

Within marriage, a man and a woman can answer their need for sexual companionship in a God-pleasing way. They will not become guilty of an immoral or unholy life. Therefore, this is indeed a blessing of marriage.

## **Children**

Children are a great blessing of marriage. They are the most precious of all gifts God gives to husband and wives. God brings life into the world through this union of a man and woman. God brings happiness to a married couple by giving them children. Psalm 127:3-5 reminds us that children are a gift from God and that they bring happiness into their parents' lives: "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."

Too often children are seen as liabilities rather than assets. But the Bible calls children a gift from the Lord and a reward. We can learn valuable lessons from their inquisitive minds and trusting spirits. Those who view children as destruction or a nuisance should instead see them as an opportunity to shape the future. We dare not treat children as an inconvenience when God values them so highly.

The power or ability to have children comes from God alone. He told Adam and Eve and then repeated his words to Noah and his sons: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

Through these words, God gave these people the ability to have children. So today, children are a gift of God which is given by his power to be a wonderful blessing of marriage.

Marriage is not merely a private institution nor is it created or re-created by governments or states. It is the foundation of the family, where children learn values and virtues that make them good Christians as well as good citizens. Marriage is important for the upbringing of the next generation, and therefore it is important for society.

Men and women are equal as persons. As males and females, they are two different ways of being human. These differences relate to each other in a total and complementary way. They make possible a unique union of persons in which spouses give themselves and receive each other in love. This union of persons has the potential to bring forth human life and thus to produce the family. No other human relationship can symbolize life and love as marriage does.

The unitive purpose of marriage means that husband and wife participate in God's self-giving love. The two become one flesh, giving mutual help and service to each other through their intimate union. The children who result from this union are the supreme gift of marriage. Some couples experience the tragedy of infertility and may be tempted to think that their union is not complete; however, it remains a distinctive union of persons.

## **Challenges of Marriage**

Since the fall of man into sin, the world has been posing serious dangers to the institution of marriage. Modern society poses fundamental challenges to the meaning and purposes of marriage. Some of these challenges are premarital sex, cohabitation, same-sex union, divorce, and polygamy.

### **Premarital sex**

Younger people in Africa and the western world are having sex before they are married. Very often this encounter is with a person they will never marry. In addition to violating the Word of God and the will of God (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6), there is the obvious risk of an unwanted pregnancy. There is also a high risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) which can lead to prolonged sickness and death.

Another great loss to those who commit sexual immorality is something which young people today rarely consider. It is the loss of a priceless and once-in-a-lifetime experience. God has created human beings that they never forget their first experience of sexual intercourse. When it is reserved for the beginning of marriage as God intended, it is an experience that brings great happiness and unity to a new husband and wife. To throw that once-in-a-lifetime moment away to momentary pleasure or lust with the wrong person will never be able to restore what he or she has lost.

In his creation of a woman for Adam, God spoke of this act as "becoming one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Nothing in modern man's experience will change the way God created human beings. Those who make the foolish decision to waste that moment outside of the will of God will have a lifetime to regret it. Those who reserve that moment to begin their marriage will be able to enjoy and renew that special experience each time they come together.

To those who have sinfully wasted that moment, there is still good news in the gospel of Christ. God forgives sin (1 John 1:9). Beyond that, he helps those who have repented of their sin and who desire to live a godly life. It will not be the same as for the person who has kept his or her virginity until marriage, but such a couple can still experience the grace and mercy of God (John 10:10; 15:7)

### **Cohabitation**

Cohabitation is an arrangement where two people are not married but live together. It often involves a romantic or sexually intimate relationship on a long-term or permanent basis. The

term cohabitation can mean any number of people living together. To cohabit, in a broad sense, means to coexist.

According to research findings carried out by different researchers, it was shown that couples who cohabit before marriage, and especially before an engagement or an otherwise clear commitment, tend to have less-satisfying marriages and are more likely to divorce than couples who live apart before marriage.

One of the biggest reasons why marriage is more successful than cohabitation is commitment. With marriage, a man and woman make a pledge before God, their family, and friends. Everyone knows that they're married and it's a public declaration. In marriage, each member of the couple is more likely to make sacrifices for their mate and to strive to make the relationship work. Additionally, divorce is costly, both emotionally and financially. By its very nature, cohabitation encourages a lack of commitment and independence and is an easy out for the partner that wants to pack a suitcase and leave.

The Bible teaches that each person planning to enter into marriage must be ready to follow God-pleasing ways because the whole meaning of marriage is expressed in each marital act. Cohabitation closes off the possibility of having a legitimate marriage and violates the rules of holy matrimony and the meanings of marriage. Many couples live together in a sexual relationship without practicing rules for entering a marriage. This is always wrong and objectively sinful because the complete gift of self can only take place in a public, permanent commitment of marriage. Cohabitation can have negative effects on couples themselves, as well as on the children who are part of the relationship. This is objectively wrong and is essentially opposed to God's plan for marriage and proper human development. Deliberate cohabitation can damage or destroy the plans for marriage and bring many other negative consequences, both personal and social.

Engagement, followed by courtship, is supposed to lead to a happy marriage. Engagement merely is a set time agreed upon by two people to engage in an activity. The most commonly recognized definition according to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* is "an appointment for a specified time; especially a social engagement between two persons of the opposite sex." Joseph and Mary were engaged when the supernatural conception and birth of Christ was announced (Matthew 1:18). Joseph was faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant. Although he knew that taking Mary as his wife could be humiliating, Joseph chose to obey the angel's command to marry Mary. His action revealed admirable qualities of righteousness, discretion, sensitivity, responsiveness to God, and self-discipline. These qualities can help believers who are engaged but struggle to make the right decision.

But marriage cannot be happy if it is not built on the right foundation. Most couples have no idea that the foundation of a successful marriage begins long before the wedding day. Besides, a direct by-product of the wrong foundation is that most people have no idea how to select the right mate.

Consent, not cohabitation, establishes a marriage bond. Christians should recognize that once they have given a firm commitment to marriage, they ought to consider themselves bound to this

before God for the rest of their lives. However, sexual relations may begin only after God's guidelines on proper marriages have been made.

## **Same-Sex Unions**

Same-sex marriage (also known as gay marriage) is the marriage of two people of the same sex or gender, established by a civil or religious ceremony. There are records of same-sex marriage dating back to the first century though there is no legal provision in Roman Law, and it was banned in the Roman Empire in the fourth century. In the modern era, same-sex marriage started being legalized at the beginning of the 21st century. Today, it is available in many countries. One of the biggest threats that same-sex marriage poses to marriage is that it would probably undercut the norm of sexual fidelity in marriage.

If same-sex civil marriage is institutionalized, our society would take yet another step down the road of de-gendering marriage. There would be more use of gender-neutral language like "partners" and—more importantly—more social and cultural pressures to neuter our thinking and our behaviors in marriage.

But marriages typically thrive when spouses specialize in gender-typical ways and are attentive to the gendered needs and aspirations of their husband or wife. For instance, women are happier when their husband earns the lion's share of the household income. Likewise, couples are less likely to divorce when the wife concentrates on childrearing and the husband concentrates on breadwinning.

Male-female complementarity is essential to marriage in Lutheran Orthodox church teaching. It makes possible authentic union and the generation of new life. Attempts to make same-sex unions the equivalent of marriage disregard the essential nature of marriage. Since marriage and same-sex civil partnerships are different realities, it's not discrimination to talk about their dangers, but these unions pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of marriage and to the fabric of society that affects all people.

The Bible clearly says, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ... will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Paul is describing the characteristics of unbelievers. He doesn't mean that all those who indulged in sexual sin are automatically and irrevocably excluded from heaven. Christians come out of all kinds of different backgrounds. They may still struggle with evil desires, but they should not continue in these practices. Paul clearly says that even those who sin in these ways can have their lives changed and their sins are forgiven by Christ. However, those who say that they are Christians but persist in these practices with no sign of remorse will not inherit the kingdom of God. Such people need to re-evaluate their lives to see if they truly believe in Christ.

## **Divorce**

Marriage is meant to be a lifelong covenantal union, which divorce seems to break. Troubled couples, as well as divorced persons, are encouraged to rely on God's help and to use the

resources of the church for support and healing. An annulment is a possibility for some divorced persons.

The marriage bond joins the two spouses in a lifelong union.<sup>10</sup> It is not only the man and woman who through their vows established the bond, but it is God who joined them together in marriage. God has reserved for himself the right to dissolve it. Jesus, referring to the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, concludes with these words: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6). God dissolves the marriage bond when he intervenes through death. Paul says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Upon his death, she is loosed from that bond and is free to marry again. Taking another husband then does not make her an adulteress (Romans 7:2-3). The same is true of the man if his wife dies. Scriptures refer to only this one manner by which God dissolves a marriage. Any dissolution of a marriage bond during the life of both husband and wife comes about through man’s sin. Sin is always involved in a divorce.

Divorce, however, is usually much more emotionally painful and hard on the injured wife or husband than polygamy, because it involves the outright rejection of one person. Divorce is also extremely painful for children.

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Divorce destroys God’s plan for marriage and the family. Children who see the love of their parents turn to hatred and eventually see them divorce are deeply hurt for life. They often become bitter and negative about marriage and angry at everyone. When a divorce has taken place in a home, the children are the ones who are most hurt. The children often develop such a low view of marriage that they repeat the same pattern of immorality and divorce which they saw in their parents.

Although God hates divorce, he recognizes that it takes place. He deals with people where they are. He will forgive this sin, just as he forgives other sins (Psalm 103:3). Divorce is becoming a serious problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially in big cities. Very few people are willing to make marriage the lifetime commitment which the Bible teaches (Matthew 19:6). This bond was not meant for breaking by a husband or wife. When young people are far away from the influence of their extended family, they often lose their moral and spiritual values. They may become involved in sexual immorality and adultery. These are the sins that lead marriages to divorce.

What does God want a person to do when his or her marriage partner has been unfaithful? He wants people to forgive one another. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). Repentance, forgiveness, and healing of broken human relationships is always God’s perfect will. Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:21-22). This principle of forgiveness can be seen in the life of the prophet Hosea. In the case of Hosea, God told him to reconcile with his unfaithful wife, Gomer, even though she was a prostitute and had betrayed Hosea many times (Hosea 3:1-3).

---

<sup>10</sup> This paragraph quotes freely from Schuetze and Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ*, 286-287.

According to an article in the *Zambia Daily Mail*, over 28,000 divorce cases were recorded countrywide in Zambia in 2019 mainly because of infidelity between spouses. According to the latest statistics from the local court office, Zambia recorded 28,101 divorces across the country's ten provinces. The average age of couples seeking divorce was between 20 and 45 years. The major causes of divorce included adultery, desertion, cruelty between spouses, the love for money and material things, lack of proper marriage counselling, interference from friends and family members, as well as poor communication, ill-treatment, and fear of contracting HIV from cheating spouses. Research indicates that divorced adults are more likely to become impoverished while their children experience psychological and economic stress which hinders their social development.<sup>11</sup>

It is a fact that a strong family is a foundation on which society is anchored. Needless to say, if marriages and families fall apart, then society cannot stand. If marriages are being dissolved at such a rate, chances of having more delinquent children and subsequently increased crime rates are equally very high.

As a church, we cannot keep our arms folded and watch our society's main pillar crumble. There is a need for all stakeholders—the church, families, government, non-governmental organizations, and others—to put our heads together to find a lasting solution.

Analysing the reasons cited for divorce, it is clear there is everything wrong with the way people enter into marriage and the reasons for doing so. We live in a society where people spend so much money and time preparing for the wedding ceremony as opposed to preparing themselves for the lifetime union. This has led to many people entering marriage ill-prepared and the results are what we are struggling with today. It is also certain that many people go into marriage for very wrong reasons. This is why at any adversity like unemployment a marriage crumbles. The high divorce rate should also be a wake-up call to rethink our values and attitude as Christians.

For instance, we live in a society where it is subtly considered an anomaly for a man or woman of a certain age to be single. This has exerted pressure on individuals, especially women, who have ended up in wrong relationships for the sake of shaking off the stigma of being single. The reasons cited for divorces, such as infidelity and gender-based violence, also point to the fact that the church has a daunting task at hand to point couples to Christian values, which are a solution to most of the challenges faced in marriages. There is certainly a need to intensify premarital counselling for couples intending to marry. This will help couples understand the seriousness of vows made on their wedding day and the commitments thereafter. It should be borne in mind that every divorce comes with the potential to create street children and social misfits who find solace in criminality. Let couples know, too, that vows exchanged on their wedding day are not just slogans but a covenant of what they pledge to abide by “till death do part them.”

With God's grace, couples are encouraged to grow in holiness. A happy marriage is made up of many virtues. Fundamentally, the couple lives out the biblical directives of faith, hope, and love. Love is the heart of the vocation of marriage. It calls spouses to imitate Jesus by their willingness to sacrifice themselves in everyday situations for each other and their children. Couples must also grow in the moral virtues of prudence, justice, and temperance. Two virtues that are

---

<sup>11</sup> “Divorce Cases from the Courts,” *Zambia Daily Mail*, August 28, 2017.

sometimes overlooked are chastity and gratitude. Marital chastity means that the couple's love is total, faithful, and exclusive. It protects a great good: the communion of persons and the procreative purpose of marriage.

Marriage is a school of gratitude, in which husband and wife are thankful for the gift of each other. They express their joyous gratitude in giving themselves completely to each other. Their gratitude leads them to be open to children and to be generous towards others. Growth in virtue is a lifelong journey, in which the spouses become more like Christ so that they can more perfectly love each other as Christ loves his church.

## **Polygamy**

Polygamy is defined as marrying more than one wife. It is a difficult problem in the world and especially in Africa. Since God provided one woman for one man at creation, polygamy is not the will of God. Polygamy did not have a good beginning. The first polygamist mentioned in the Bible (Lamech) was also a murderer (Genesis 4:23). Polygamy, however, is the same thing as adultery. Polygamy is a common practice in many traditional African cultures.

Many men whom God used in the Bible times, like King David, were polygamists. Some people use this fact to justify polygamy in African life. Although God used these men for his purpose, he did not want them to be polygamists. Regarding kings, God said "The king ... must not take many wives" (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). The truth is that God allowed Old Testament polygamists to suffer the consequences of taking more than one wife. This can be seen in the life of Abraham (Genesis 16:1-6).

From the time he took Hagar as a second wife, Abraham had no happiness in his home. There was jealousy between Hagar and Sarah and jealousy between Isaac and Ishmael. The jealousy and hatred between Isaac and Ishmael and their descendants have continued for many years right down to the present day.

There are strong cultural arguments in support of polygamy such as:

1. Having several wives has been a symbol of power, wealth, and influence.
2. A man in traditional society needs to continue his family name into future generations. Having several wives usually ensures that he will have many male children to continue his name.
3. Closely related to the continuation of one's family name is the idea that by having many children and grandchildren, one will be remembered and honored long after death.
4. In agricultural societies, several wives are a way to ensure having many children and hence the necessary laborers for farming, cattle herding, and housework.
5. Polygamy solves the problem of single-parent mothers.
6. To have several wives and many children makes a man feel secure about his care in old age.

All of these arguments suggest that polygamy makes sense from a traditional point of view. However, the Bible is clear that this is not the will of God. Although polygamy is not presented

in the Bible as a great sin, it is certainly not approved by God in any way. Polygamy is a man-made arrangement to satisfy the desires of a person with a non-Christian world view. The Bible indicates that a large earthly family can be a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). But this blessing will not come when people violate the will of God for marriage. It will not come when polygamous husbands eliminate harmony and peace for their wives and children by taking additional wives.

The argument based on improving morality deserves special attention. Yes, immorality is wrong, but polygamy is not God's solution to the problem. The solution is a regular sexual union between one husband and one wife. If the wife resists this, the husband should seek wise counsel from the church leaders concerning immorality in general. The truth is that many men continue to indulge in adultery whether they have one wife or several wives. The problem of lust is not cured by polygamy. There are many cases where a man commits adultery and then later takes the woman as a wife to legalize his adultery. King David did this with Bathsheba even though he had several wives, but God condemned David for his sin (2 Samuel 11:26-27).

It is not the Christian solution to polygamy to require a converted polygamist to drive away all but one wife. That would be unjust and irresponsible behavior from a husband who has committed to care for his wives (Numbers 30:1-2, 16). Instead, the solution is supportive prayer and counsel from the pastor and elders of the local church so that God may work things out in his perfect way. Only God can work out a solution that will not hurt people unnecessarily. Only God can work out the problem in answer to prayers. God's solution is always compassionate and perfect, but God's way may take many years to work out. Prayer and patience are the ways for a polygamist to find God's answer to his situation.

The problems associated with polygamy are very difficult to solve. Let this be a warning to those who are not yet married. It is a great mistake for a man to take more than one wife. The polygamist must not assume any leadership role in the local church. The Bible says, "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). This is because God wants his plan of one woman for one man in marriage to be visibly seen in the lives of the church leaders.

Polygamy is not the will of God. It is an act of rebellion for a Christian to take a second wife. It is a sin and the church must deal with it. God planned for one man to have only one wife. The Christian who takes a second wife must be disciplined by the local church (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

### **The Solutions to Challenges Facing Christian Marriages**

Some of the solutions to challenges facing Christian marriages are premarital counselling, respecting the position of each other, trust, confidence, and reconciliation.

#### **Premarital Counselling<sup>12</sup>**

Ideally, parents should provide all the needed preparation, guidance, and teachings that are required by youths for them to understand the important step of marriage that they will one day

---

<sup>12</sup> This section quotes freely from Schuetze and Habeck, *Shepherd under Christ*, 292-293.

take. Parents and guardians will influence the views of the marriage relationship for good or evil. The church should teach parents and children what God's Word says about marriage, family life, and the respective responsibilities of husband, wife, and children in a home. In doing this it will help to build Christian homes where children will by example and precept receive the preparation for marriage that is needed. At the same time, children will learn from the Word of God what considerations and attitudes should be prominent as they approach the choice of a spouse and marriage.

The pastor will in his instruction classes, in young people's group, and wherever opportunity makes it possible seek to provide additional guidance to the youth of the congregation for eventual marriage. He has the ongoing responsibility of teaching proper Christian attitudes toward sex, courtship, and marriage.

The church today is faced with an increasing number of homes torn by troubles. The erosion of the family and the growing divorce rate are evident also among the church's members. Counseling with those who are experiencing a crisis in the family requires a great amount of the pastor's time. This points up the importance of providing specific premarital counseling for those intending to enter into wedlock.

Such premarital counseling can serve a dual purpose. By directing the bride and groom to the Word of God, by showing them what the Word of God says about marriage and family life, the pastor can hope to establish a solid union under God, one that with divine help can cope with problems as they arise.

### **Respecting the Position of Each Other**

After marriage, the spouses acquire a new status which is generally recognized by the rest of the community. The man becomes a husband and later the father of his children, while the woman becomes a wife and later a mother. Each spouse should recognize their new status and strive to function within this new situation effectively. The wife will need to recognize and respect the position of the husband as the head of the newly established family. Remember it is a new and challenging position for him. He has never been a husband before, neither has he had professional training as a husband. He will need all the support of his wife to feel he is the head and to be given a chance to implement his duties as the head of the wife and consequently head of the whole household. The wife will need to help her husband by supporting him morally, not taking over his position by being dominating. Even if he is lacking in many leadership qualities, he is still her husband. Some women are known to command their husbands with strong words and sometimes abuse them physically. Marriage is not a competition but complementation. Even if a husband is not eloquent, the wife should be careful not to put her words in his mouth and finish his sentences for him and continue lecturing him. This amounts to hurting him. The wife should be patient with her husband and let him feel appreciated in his new position. There are those strong and dominating men who want to feel like the person of authority in the home. They too need their wives' support to exercise their authority in love and humility. The best way to help such a husband is to avoid confrontation and look for opportunities for him to see that he does not need to be harsh to be obeyed, but that the wife submits because she loves him.

## **Trust and confidence**

The spouses need to cultivate each other's trust so that they can faithfully confide in each other. This requires that each spouse command the respect and trust of the other from the way each handles the affairs of their home. Spouses need to safeguard against disclosing anything about the other to people outside. They need to protect each other by avoiding the temptation of discussing their negative aspects with friends, parents, and relatives. If there is anything to talk about, your spouse should be the first person to know and the first with whom to discuss the matter. A Chewa proverb says "*Banja ndi umfiti saulula,*" meaning spouses should learn to keep each other's secret no matter what circumstance may arise in their life. They should not wash their dirty linen in public but resolve their differences amicably and trust each other.

A wife should let her husband know that she can keep his secrets. She should encourage him to speak about his problems by being understanding, thoughtful, and patient with him. Some wives have revealed a lot of things about their homes in the so-called "fellowships and community prayers." In this process of sharing with others what God is doing for them in their homes, they end up sharing the disagreements, the unfaithfulness, and other delicate matters in their private life with each other. From there, members of the fellowship continue to talk about what God is doing for their sister or brother in Christ and this may end up as scandalous gossip. Others share their problems as items for prayers, but this also ends up in a kind of "holy" gossip. When it reaches your spouse, no matter how good he/she is, he will be offended and will not trust you anymore. As a result of such practices, which were not ill-motivated, some spouses have created walls between themselves.

You will find husbands who never disclose their financial investments, loan properties, or other business with their wives. Others may inform the wife about the place where the husband owns the property.

Spouses should pray together, complain about each other to God, but still maintain each other's confidence. This is a necessary skill that every wife and husband needs to cultivate, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when families are undergoing great social and economic changes. There is a lot to complain about and to talk about, but let it be done with the right person and in the right place, with your spouse in the secrecy of your home.

## **Reconciliation**

This is an important healing skill for couples in relationships. Spouses need to share their hurts as soon as they occur. They should choose the appropriate moment to sort out the hurts and forgive each other again and forget all the various hurts in a fresh start. They need to live for the present in their relationship. They married each other to be together. Let the husband and wife be greatest friends. Let the spouse be the one person they can call upon to solve internal matters. It is a worthy practice for spouses to go places together as much as possible, e.g., to church, shopping, visiting friends, parties, etc. Recreation and hobbies can help to mend the broken relationship and cement reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

Marriage is found in all cultures of the world in some form. According to the Bible, marriage was the very first human social institution. It was God himself who planned marriage when he created mankind as male and female and then performed the very first marriage himself.

God planned for one man to be married to one woman as a lifetime commitment of faithfulness, love, companionship, encouragement, support, enjoyment, and mutual help. Other forms of marriage, such as polygamy, same-sex, or cohabiting are man's idea and not God's will. Divorce destroys God's perfect plan for human happiness in marriage. God hates divorce. Within marriage, sex is pure and blessed by God. It is the way God grants the blessing of children and the means of pleasure for husbands and wives. All sexual relations outside of marriage, such as sexual immorality and adultery, are serious sins which God has promised to punish.

Marriage only works the way God planned for it to work when husbands and wives follow the commandments of Scripture. For example, in leading their wives, husbands are to follow the example of Christ himself (Ephesians 5:23). Another example for wives to follow in submitting to their husbands is the church's relationship to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). Husbands are commanded to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). This is servant leadership and self-sacrificing love. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). The secret to this submission is doing it for the sake of Christ. The example for parents to follow in raising their children is the example of God our heavenly Father, as he loves, provides for, guides, leads, teaches, and protects his children (Ephesians 5:1-2). These responsibilities can only be fully carried out with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Children are God's blessing in marriage, but the inability to bear children does not indicate that the couple is cursed by God. Such an idea comes from the false teaching of non-Christian religions. If there is difficulty in conceiving children, a couple should consult medical doctors or wait patiently for God to grant them children at his appointed time.

## **Bibliography**

Hetherington, E. Mavis, and John Kelly. *For Better or For Worse*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Kiura, Jane M. *Courtship and Marriage*. Nairobi, Kenya: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1987.

O'Donovan, Wilbur. *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995.

Schuetze, Armin W. and Irwin J. Habeck. *The Shepherd under Christ*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 1981.