



Family Life and Single Parenthood: A Moral Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Marriage and family life is instituted so that husband and wife might complete one another and share in God's creative work through the procreation and nurturing of godly children. God planned marriage to meet the human need for companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help and sexual satisfaction. It was God's original plan that children should be born and raised in security and love created by one man and one woman in marital bond for a lifetime. In Single Parenthood, such ideals set by God can hardly be achieved. Single parenting is a marital breakdown that challenges the contemporary church. It is also one of the reasons why some people are not morally and socially stable in life. Single Parenthood contradicts God's will and frustrates his purpose for marriage and family life. This challenge of single parents has always been one of the major moral issues that make family living incomplete. This paper posits that the church has vital role to play as regard to single parenthood of whatever kind. God desires that the victims receive justice, love, caring, and forgiveness as the case may be.

Keywords: Parenthood, Marriage, Family life and Church

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of Single Parenthood

Single parenthood is a complex phenomenon, which have long been in existence. It is not a new phenomenon among common couples. Right from time immemorial till the contemporary, this challenge of single parents have always been one of the major moral issues that makes family living incomplete. A single parent is a solo parenthood. This referred to parent who has the most responsibilities of the upbringing of the child or children daily, which makes him or her as the primary caregiver who is not living with a spouse; especially if the parents are separated or divorced. Children stay with their custodial parent with little or no care from non-custodial parent (Dowd, 1997)

Single parents can be young girls who have an unplanned pregnancy, a woman who wants a child but not a partner, a parent deserted or divorced by a spouse, former cohabiters, or widows or widowers left to care for young children. Sometimes a parent becomes a single parent in all but name, because of the other spouse's inability, physical or mental, to share in caring for the children (Griffiths, 1995). Single parent adoption is sometimes an option for adults who want children but do not have a partner or spouse. There are also a few options for women who want to mother or be single parents on their own by choice, through adoption, artificial insemination or vitro fertilization.

The majority of single parents are women and mothers who are mostly the primary caregivers in a single parenthood family as a result of divorce or unplanned pregnancy. Single fathers have been the less common caregivers in the past, presumably due to the father working most of the day resulting in less bonding or intimacy with the innocent children, or possibly a young child needing to still nurse, or grandparents, if childcare was necessary. While the man or father works, the mother would be seen to be better suited. This scenario has shifted in recent years, as many fathers are taking an active parental role as stay-at-home dad as more mothers are in the workforce and being the sole provider to the family,

resulting in fathers bonding and connecting more to their children especially in the western World (Benokraitis, 2012).

The prevalence of single mothers as primary caregivers is a part of traditional parenting trends between mothers and parents. In his research on marriage and family and gender roles, Benokraitis defines mothers as the expressive role players, who provide the emotional support and nurturing that sustain the family unit. Because of this, mothers outshine fathers who tend to be stricter and more distant. One of a woman's expressive roles is that of kin-keeper, an important communication link among family members. Children tend to drift towards preferring of parent depending on how involved a particular parent is, and a common problem in society today are absentee fathers; therefore, children are more likely to show preference for their mothers, as they are more involve with them than the fathers (Benokraitis, 2012).

Single parenthood tends to find difficulty with the lack of help they needed. A great deal has been done on the hardships of a single-parenthood (Nimkoff, 1988). More often than not a single parent finds it difficult to find help because there is a lack of support whether it is a second parent or other family members (Neckermen, 2004). Furthermore, dependency is a hardship that many parents find difficult to overcome. As the single parents become closer to their child, the child grows more and more dependent upon that parent. This dependency, while common, may reach for post childhood, damaging the child due to their lack of independence from the parent. Social isolation of single parents might also be a stress factor that they transmit to children. This can have a negative impact on the child's relationship (Williams, 2006).

Causes of Single Parenthood

Death of a Partner: Death of a partner was a common cause of single parenting. Diseases and maternal death not infrequently resulted in a widower or widow responsible for children. At certain times, wars might also deprive significant numbers of families of a parent. Improvement in sanitation and material care, have decreased mortality for those of reproductive age, making death a less common cause of single parenting.

Divorce: Marital break down is one of the greatest problems in family life that resulted to single parenthood. Today divorce occurred for many reasons including adultery, cruelty, desertion, drunkenness, and neglect to provide, vagrancy, conviction of crime, separation, bigamy, incompatibility, fraudulent representation, misconduct and many others (Alban, 2016). This is also part of the reasons why some people are not morally and socially stable in the society. Divorce contradicts God's will, and frustrates his purpose for marriage and family life. Psychologically and financially, the trauma of divorce is often worse than bereavement among the women in most cases. All divorcees need open ears to listen to grieves and hopes. Single parents need to share their burdens with other families, especially when there are no grandparents nearby. They need complete moral support and assurance that God forgives them even when they cannot forgive themselves, and that the single are able to serve God with less distraction than the married people (Kennedy, 1995).

Unintended Pregnancy: Unintended pregnancy is another cause of single parenting. Some out of wedlock births intended, but many are unintentional. Where out of wedlock birth accepted by the society, it may result to single parenting. Where it is not acceptable, it sometimes resulted in forced marriage; however, such marriage fails more often than the other does. Mothers with unintended pregnancies and their children are subjected to numerous advise health effects, including increased risk of violence and death, and the children are less likely to care for and more likely to live in poverty and be involved in crime (Brown, 1995).

Single Parent Adoption: Adoption is the legal act in which at least one adult, not biological parent of the child adopted, undertakes the responsibilities of parenthood and recognized as that child's parent. Traditionally, the norm has been for married couples only to adopt, although the adoption of children by single parents or unmarried couples not generally prohibited in many societies. Christians view is that the adoption of a child by couple as morally and emotionally superior to adoption by a single parent. Although adoption of special needs children and older children to a single parent is often preferable to institutionalization. The church rightly has reservations about the adoption of children to same-sex

couples or unmarried parents, not because we know of damaging psychological effects of such adoptions, but because these relationships do not comport well with Christian understanding of family (Kennedy, 1995). Single parents' adoption; however, are still preferred to divorcees, as divorced parents are considered unnecessary stress on the child (Shiremen, 1985).

Effects of Single Parenthood

Due to inability of couples to manage their marital causes, many marriages end up in single parenting. As result, children from solo parents are affected mainly, socially, economically as well as academic performances. Babies born to unmarried parents seem to appear more prone to poor performance in relationship than complete parents children do. Nwa-Chu stresses that those children from single parenting homes have often been through a period of great disturbance and have witnessed bitterness and emotional tensions in their parents, which can leave them with feelings of insecurity that, may likely affect their social life (Nwa-Chu, 1994). Single parents will often find it more difficult to monitor the activities of their children. Children bear stresses in many ways, including the enduring of neglect, and sexual, emotional and physical abuse. Children, regarded as precious in the sight of God, may be seen as, and sadly often are, innocent victims of irresponsible adult behavior (Francis, 1995).

Single parents often suffer from a sense of isolation and loneliness; therefore, they need wholesome friendship. Many get into financial difficulty and require debt counseling. Left alone to bring up children, they often lack support of a practical kind and are often cut off from any meaningful social life of their own. A single parent widow lacked her husband, the person vital to her well-being who would protect and provide for her. It is hard for her to survive, even at subsistence level. She is open to exploitation and to bring denied her most basic rights.

Moral Support of Single Parenthood

There is little if any direct teaching in the Bible on single parenthood, for the obvious reason premarital sexual intercourse is strongly forbidden (Griffiths, 1995). Sexual intercourse between unmarried persons is refers to as fornication, which Scripture is against such act. The word commonly translated 'fornication' that is *porneia* in the New Testament, is an umbrella term for extra-marital sex of all kinds (Acts 15:20; 1 Cor.6:13). Christian ethicists agree that fornication is wrong, but there are important differences of interpretation. Many take the New Testament's ban on fornication to imply a total condemnation of all extra-marital intercourse. Others believe the ethical veto does not extend to intercourse between committed but officially unmarried couples who are in relationship of deep troth (Othius, 1995).

However, there is significant material to provide guidance for the church today as regards to single parenthood. Hagar, in effect a single mother, returned to Abraham's household on the angel of the Lord's instruction (Gen.16:9), there to bear his child Ishmael. Widows, along with the poor and aliens, allowed gleaning at harvest time (Dt.24:19-22). Widows are not to be taken advantage of (Ex.22:22-23), because God is the protector and vindicator of the widow and the fatherless (Dt.10:18; Ps.68:5) and concerned for their plight (Acts 4:34).

Since single parents of whatever kind are often poor and vulnerable, especially single mothers, it follows that God desires that they receive justice. The church, as God's extended family, can provide a caring community to support single parents and perhaps significant adults to fill gaps in some children's lives. The church is certainly to care rather than to condemn and, to demonstrate the nature of true religion (James1:27). In the body of Christ, single parents ought to be able to find healing for their hurts through the gospel, and a loving acceptance, which models the grace of God, revealed in Christ (Griffiths, 1995).

Those who have lost a partner through death call for careful pastoral support, especially in the period of six weeks to six months after the death and on significant anniversaries. They may need help in coming to terms with their loss themselves, and in working it through with their bereaved children. The normal stages of loss must work through, and empathetic listening can help a great deal. There is a need to separate from the dead person and from his or her status and role; there is a transition to undergo from confusion and uncertainty to being able to discover and accept a new status, being partner-less, and finally

reincorporation into the community. It is realistic to allow up to two years or even longer for this (Townsend, 1995).

In case of single parenthood by divorce, whatever stance adapted to remarriage, all can agree that loyalty to scriptural principles demands that all Christians, both individually and corporately, should work to maintain existing marriages and offer support and encouragement to those who are divorced. We need to encourage partners to reconcile their differences rather than seek divorce. However, once divorce has occurred and reconciliation is out of question, the pastoral perspective alters. Our response is to bind up the broken-hearted and comfort those who mourn. The church family should provide a network of care and support to all kind of single parents.

God's Design for Family Life

In God's plan, family life is the basis for a morally and socially stable society. He wants husbands, wives and children to experience love and acceptance and to be complete. Marriage and family life made for that purpose. This is part of the reason why God hates adultery (Ex.20:14), sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3-6), incest (Lev.18:6ff), and homosexuality (Rom. 1:24-28). These things disrupt and twist God's plan for a stable human society. Part of the reason why many societies today are morally and socially unstable is because people have determined to live without regard for God's laws. Unfortunately, there are severe consequences for sexual sins. The great increase in divorce and broken homes, and most single parenthoods are just the reason of these consequences.

Marriage is God's plan for all people and all cultures in the world. The family cannot be replaced by any other institution in God's plan for humankind. If someone corrupts family life, he or she is interfering with God's plan for the completely human race. God performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:21-25). We have spoiled family life through our immorality and unfaithfulness. God intended the parenthood of one man and his wife to raise children together for a lifetime. In Matthew 19:6-8, 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 not man separate." This lifetime commitment is important for several reasons.

First, it guarantees care, provision and protection for wife throughout her life (Col.3:12-13, 1 Peter 3:7). Second, there is a need for the emotional security and development of 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 family was to provide an emotionally stable and loving home environment in which to raise godly children.

Another reason why God planned one woman for one-man parenthood for a lifetime has to do with family's need for emotional security. A single parenting is emotionally imbalanced for the parent-child relationship. It is just as important for the parents to meet their emotional needs for each other as they work together to meet the children's physical needs. The family needs mental and emotional unity. Mental and emotional unity comes in the family when the couple lives in harmony and agreement. To find this kind of 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 family need for companionship, acceptance, and value as human beings and prolongs parenthood (Townsend, 1995).

CONCLUSIONS

It was God's original plan that children should be born and raised in security and love created by one man and one woman in marital bond for a lifetime. In Single Parenthood, such ideals set by God can hardly be achieved. Single parenting is a marital breakdown that challenges the contemporary church. The church has vital role to play as regard to single parenthood of whatever kind. God desires that they receive justice, love, caring, and forgiveness as the case may be. Single parents ought to be able to find healing for their hurts through the biblical message of hope, and a loving acceptance, which models the grace of God, revealed in Christ. Our corporate responsibility is to care rather than to condemn and, by

understanding, compassion and agape love as a demonstration of God's adopted family on earth through Jesus Christ. In God's plan, family life is the basis for a morally and socially stable society. He wants husbands, wives and children to experience love and acceptance and to be complete. Marriage and family life made for that purpose.

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