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## Handling Marital Infidelity: The Hosea Example

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examined marital infidelity, an age long problem that has ruined once blissful marriages. The objective was to examine the nature, causes, consequences as well as the Biblical approach to handle infidelity. To accomplish this objective, the discursive approach using data from the Bible and contemporary studies was adopted. Findings revealed that infidelity is widespread in most parts of the world. However, the latest study on marital infidelity across countries indicates that Nigerian women are now ranked as the most unfaithful in the world. Although the results of that study is now disputed by some Nigerian scholars and commentators, this study based on the story of prophet Hosea recommends that genuine repentance on the part of the unfaithful spouse and willingness to forgive on the part of the offended spouse are the keys to the survival of a marital relationship whenever infidelity occurs.*

**Key words:** Marriage, Infidelity, Divorce, Extra-marital affair, Forgiveness

### **1. Introduction**

Although there are hundreds of denominations in Christendom around the world which hardly agree on doctrinal issues, yet there are very few areas of common grounds or agreement among them. One of such is the belief that the Bible is the infallible word of God. Virtually all Christian denominations believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, although interpretations differ from one theological persuasion to another.

The Bible (a canonical collection of sacred books) also referred to as the Holy Scriptures is made up of 66 books; 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. It was written by 40 authors who lived years apart. According to White (1998:5), the Bible points to God as its author yet it was written by human hands and in the varied style of its different books, it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed in the Bible are all "given by the inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16), yet they are expressed in the words of men.

Written in different ages by men who differed widely in rank and occupation and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style as well as the nature of the subjects. Christians believe that through the Bible God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. White (1988:7) further asserts that the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of God's will to Man.

In the Biblical account of creation, after creating the earth and the elements, God thereafter created man to inhabit and have dominion over it. The first man, Adam, lived alone in the Garden of Eden for quite some time (most probably years) before God stated that it was not good that he should live alone hence the creation of a woman (Eve) as "an help meet for him." (Gen 2:18KJV). This Biblical account of the creation of Eve as Adam's companion in the Garden of Eden is generally believed by Christians as the beginning of the marriage institution.

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

### 2.1. Marriage

Marriage (also referred to as matrimony or wedlock) is a concept that is not easy to define because of the diversities in the systems of marriage throughout the world. According to Otite and Ogionwo (1979:78), marriage is such that although it is known to have common qualities, it varies from one group to another. The Wikipedia (2012) agrees with this assertion when it states that the definition of marriage varies according to cultures but adds that it is generally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual are acknowledged.

The above notwithstanding, there are some classic definitions of marriage. One of such is that by Westermack (1929) cited in Wikipedia (2012) who states that marriage is “a more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the first offspring.” He later refined this definition and offered another all embracing definition which states that marriage is a “relation of one or more men to one or more women that is recognized by custom or law.”

A close examination of the marriage and family literature reveals that most of the definitions of marriage reflect the Western type of monogamous marriage. In this regard, Stark (2006) defines marriage as “a formal commitment between a couple to maintain a long term relationship involving specific rights and duties toward one another and towards their children.”

The Oxford Dictionary defines marriage as the formal union of a man and a woman, typically as recognized by law, by which they become husband and wife.” Similarly, the marriageabout.com website defines marriage as “the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.” This definition also reflects the Christian perspective of marriage which can simply be stated as a union between a man and a woman as endorsed by God’s word. The people involved in a marital relationship are usually known as spouses.

Marriage is a first and foremost a relationship between a man and a woman. Some authorities speak of a ‘strict definition of marriage’ in which the individuals are obligated to remain married to one another as long and they shall live and are forbidden from marrying or having sexual /romantic relationships with anyone else. Other authorities, however, speak of ‘a less strict definition of marriage’ that allows for the possibility of divorce under certain conditions which can vary from very stringent to less stringent.

Through marriage, new rights, roles and social relationships are formed not only between the spouses but also between the kinsmen of the spouses. Some of the key rights associated with marriage include sexual monopoly and those with respect to the children born within from the marriage.

According to the Wikipedia (2012) people get married for several reasons including legal, social, being in love, libidinal, emotional, financial, spiritual or religious. The act of marriage usually creates normative or legal obligations between the individuals involved. Marriage is usually recognized by the state, religious institution, a local community or even peers. Marriage is often viewed as a contract. Civil marriage is the legal concept of marriage in a governmental institution irrespective of religious affiliation in accordance with the marriage laws of the jurisdiction. Being married gives legitimacy to sexual relations within the relationship.

When marriage is defined as the union being between a man and a woman, the intention is to differentiate the Christian concept of marriage from other form of marriage especially same sex marriage also known as gay marriage. This form of marriage which most Christians are opposed to has gained legal recognition in several countries. These include Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portland, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, some states in the United States of America among others.

In most Western countries, marriage can be performed in a civil ceremony or in a religious setting such as a church or temple. In Nigeria, there are three types of marriages usually recognized as legitimate. These are statutory (civil), customary and religious (Christian or Islamic).

Our perspective in this paper is Christian marriage that is based on Biblical principles. In this perspective, marriage is regarded as having been appointed by God and is also a gift of God in creation and a means of grace through which a man and a woman become one in heart, mind and body. In the Christian perspective also, marriage is considered a sacred and lifelong union of a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in love and trust. It signifies the mystery of the union between Christ and the church.

The Christian perspective also believes that marriage is instituted so that children may be born and brought up in security, love, and fear of God so that society may stand upon a firm foundation. Furthermore, it views marriage as a way of life which all people involved should honor and it is not to be entered into lightly or selfishly.

The above notwithstanding, the institution of marriage has been beset with a myriad of problems that has affected its sanctity and purpose. One of the key problems that have affected the marriage institution is infidelity or marital unfaithfulness.

### 2.2. Marital Infidelity

According to the Wikipedia (2012) infidelity also referred to as unfaithfulness, cheating, adultery or having an affair) refers to a breach of an expectation of sexual and or emotional exclusivity or implied in an intimate relationship. It further explains that sexual infidelity by a marriage partner is commonly referred to as philandering.

Swenson (2009) explains that infidelity occurs whenever a person engages in a relationship with another that violates the sanctity of marriage. This happens when the new relationship results in a breakdown of trust; develops intimacy with another that does not belong in the marriage; when experiences are shared with a new person other than with a spouse. Infidelity can occur with or without sex.

The Holman Bible Dictionary (cited in the Franklin Electronic Bible 2007) equates marriage infidelity with fornication when it states that fornication means being unfaithful to a marriage commitment.” In a similar vein, Samuel (2012) states that infidelity means to be

unfaithful to a covenant, to an agreement, to a bond such as marriage. According to her, unfaithfulness is the breaking of a sacred vow or bond. It is not just the act, but the gradual moving, alteration of what is held in high regard.

According to her, "if you say to your spouse 'I will love you forever' and one day you said, 'I do not love you anymore', you are unfaithful. She further posits that if a wife no longer submits willingly to the husband, it is unfaithfulness. The same applies to the husband who no longer treats his wife right.

Infidelity can also be explained as behavior or actions done contrary to the marriage vow or contract voluntarily entered into by a couple. It is usually seen as a betrayal of the sacred marriage agreement by a spouse.

What constitutes an act of infidelity varies between and within cultures and depends on the type of relationship that exists between people. This is why it is important for a couple to know how far they can go before it can be considered that a partner is unfaithful. There are some people who think they are unfaithful only when they physically intimate with another person. However, for others, sending a text message to someone else in the exact words as it is usually sent to a spouse may mean breaking the rules of exclusivity. Marital infidelity is a common occurrence in society and a key factor in marriage collapse. It usually causes pain to the victims. A spouse's unfaithfulness is regarded by most married people as the most painful experience that can be inflicted on them in a marriage. There are several Bible passages against marital infidelity.

### 2.3. Empirical Review

According to Sharon (2008), there is a 50-50 chance that one partner in the USA will have an affair during a marriage including the non-physical relationships. It is also estimated that roughly 30-60 percent of all married individuals in the USA will engage in infidelity at some point during their marriage. Some authorities have also observed that infidelity is involved in 90 percent of first time divorcees. Another study cited in the Wikipedia (2012) indicated that more than half of the marriages that experience infidelity ended in divorce. However, another study cited in the Wikipedia found that 27 percent of people who reported being happy in marriage admitted to having had affairs.

Some studies suggest that around 30 to 40 percent of unmarried relationships and 18 to 20 percent of marriages are marked by at least one incident of sexual infidelity. Men are more likely than women to have a sexual affair, regardless of whether or not they are in a married or unmarried relationship. Gottman (2011) however, reported that only 20 percent of divorce cases are caused by an affair. He concluded that most marriages die with a whimper as people turn away from one another, slowly growing apart.

In the United Kingdom, 50 divorce lawyers were asked to name the most common causes of their cases in court. Of those who cited extramarital affairs 55 percent of them stated that it was a cheating husband that precipitated divorce while 45 percent stated it was a cheating wife.

In another study by Gray (2007) it was discovered that extramarital sex occurs in up to 25 percent of heterosexual marriages in the USA. Many experts believe this increase in cheating is due to greater opportunity (time spent away from a spouse) and young people developing the habit of having multiple sexual partners before they get married.

Children can be witnesses to an affair and outcomes of an affair. Between two to four percent of children in the USA is conceived as a result of an affair. A 2005 scientific review of international published studies of paternal discrepancy found a range in incidence from 0.8percent to 30percent (medium 3.7percent).

According to the infidelity facts website [www.infidelityfacts.com](http://www.infidelityfacts.com) (2008) in 41 percent of marriages in the USA, one or both spouses admitted to infidelity either physical or emotional; 57 percent of men admitted to have committed infidelity in any relationship they have had while 54 percent of women admitted to have committed infidelity in any relationship they have had.

Similarly, 36 percent of men and women admitted to having had an affair with a co-worker; 36 percent of men and women admit to infidelity on business trips; 17 percent of men and women admit to infidelity (emotional and physical) with a brother-in-law or sister-in-law.

The data also indicate that 31 percent of marriages survived after an affair had been admitted or discovered. Similarly, 74 percent of men stated that they would have an affair if they knew they would never get caught while 66 percent of women stated that they would have an affair if they knew they would never get caught. Facts and statistics about infidelity published in the website [www.truthaboutdeception.com](http://www.truthaboutdeception.com) indicate that infidelity is becoming more common among people under 30.

Studies also indicate that men are more likely to cheat than women. But, as women become more financially independent, they have started to act more like men with respect to infidelity. The data also indicate that in many cases, infidelity never gets discovered. Also, as more and more women enter the work force, 'office romance' is becoming more common. Spouses often spend more time with coworkers than with each other. Also the internet, e-mail, and chat rooms and social media have made it easier for people to engage in infidelity. The initial decision to be unfaithful is rarely ever a rational choice; instead infidelity is usually driven by circumstances and one's emotions.

Studies also indicate that emotional infidelity, compared to just physical infidelity, can inflict as much, if not more, hurt, pain and suffering to a marriage. And to make matters worse, most infidelity involves both physical and emotional betrayal.

Some people believe that some people find a more suitable mate after they are already married. Most Americans admit to having fantasies that involve someone other than a spouse. Jealousy is such a fundamental, universal emotion because infidelity has been a part of our human nature for a very long time.

A recent study indicates that cheating men spend more money on their mistresses than their wives. The data obtained from 2,000 men who use the Illicit Encounters website, an extra marital affairs dating service in the UK found that cheating men spend an average of \$192 on gift items for their mistresses while \$170 is spent on those of their wives.

During the study, 98 percent of men admitted to choosing something ultimately decorative with that being the sole purpose for their mistresses in comparison to 42 percent of the men surveyed choosing an item for their wives. Half of the men preferred to choose something 'practical and useful for around the home' for their wives. Cheating expert and spokesperson for Illicit Encounters, Rosie Freeman-Jones then concluded that the way men buy gifts show how they feel about their relationships (cited in *The Guardian*, 2012). Data on infidelity in Nigeria are difficult to come by as most people prefer to shy away from such an issue. However, in a recent survey conducted by condom manufacturer, Durex, in which 29,000 respondents in 36 countries were interviewed, Nigerian women were ranked as the most unfaithful in the world.

According to the survey, Thailand men are the most unfaithful in the world, with 54 percent of them admitting to cheating on their spouses. South Korea came second with 34 percent, while Malaysia ranked number three with 33 percent.

The survey revealed that the top two countries with cheating women are Nigeria, with 62 percent, and Thailand, 59 percent. It further indicated that 39 percent of Malaysian women also confessed to having betrayed their partners. Russian women came fourth at 33 percent while Singaporeans are fifth at 19 percent.

An independent survey also conducted by Africa AE affirms the fact that Nigeria with a population of over 160 million tops the chart for cheating women. Corruption and a general distrust among citizens were cited as being largely responsible for this (cited in *Leadership*, 2012). Several Nigerians have, however, reacted angrily to these research findings disputing the representativeness of the sample. Some critics have also queried the respondents used in the studies.

#### 2. 4. *Theoretical framework*

According to the Wikipedia (2012) the Freudian theory of adultery expresses the belief that it is natural and human to have sexual desires. However, adultery is seen as a classic manifestation of 'antinomic' desires splitting the psyche of the adulterer. The split is externalized in three sectors:

- The betrayed spouse is the superego
- The lover is the id and
- The adulterer is the ego

Social norms and institutions act as extensions of the super ego to regulate behaviours prompted by the id thus implicitly blaming the third party for intruding between the rational sense and the conscience.

Cohen (cited in Wikipedia, 2012), has also explained that in a marital relationship, mirror neurons-miniscule brain cells located behind the eye sockets – connect spouses at an internal level. Each spouse mirrors the other spouse's actions and feelings of attraction, romance, love, good memories and happy times. To ensure that these heady experiences occur, the brain triggers the release of love inducing chemicals such as oxytocin, vasopressin, dopamine, testosterone and natural opioids along with mood enhancing neurotransmitters, serotonin and GABA. And so the chemistry couples feel has a scientific explanation. Indeed, the brain is the seat of love and mirror neurons its beating pulse.

Unfortunately problems or relationship killers, arise. When problems are not resolved, mirror neurons connect a couple in resentments disappointments and a waning of passion and sexual desire. Hurtful interactions are repeated over and over and get lodged in the brain. Love inducing chemicals are on hold and it seems like the end of love and passion. At this stage the relationship is ripe for infidelity.

### 3. Method

This study adopted the discursive research approach which involves obtaining data or information from secondary sources. According to Berger (2000) this qualitative research technique involves the examination of studies that other researchers have made on a subject as the basis for analysis or evaluation of the current issue

### 4. Discussion

#### 4.1. *Types of Marital Infidelity*

The marriage infidelity literature reveals variants in the concept of infidelity. These include sexual (physical), emotional, opportunistic, obligatory, romantic, conflicted- romantic, object and parallel partnership infidelity.

Sexual or physical affair denotes a purely physical affair in which sex is the only relationship between the two people involved. Sometimes, it involves payment for sex and there is little or no emotion involved. This type of infidelity is strictly about nookie, nothing more.

An emotional affair is when there is no smooching but lots of sentiments. In this kind of affair, the married person spends quality time with someone who is not his spouse especially in times of need. It is the redirection of emotional resources such as romantic love, time and attention to a person or persons outside a relationship. The level of intimate involvement can extend from in-person involvement to online affairs. According to Samuel (2012:12) emotional infidelity is the most dangerous type of affairs. He further describes it as follows:

..... *she has your children yet her heart is not with you, it is usually in form of detached affection. He still gives you money, sleeps with you, yet he has a love, a special person, a romantic feeling for someone else. He may not have slept with the other person but that's the most important person.*

It is probably the emotional affair Jesus Christ was referring to when he stated that, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her had committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt 5:27:28).

Emotional as compared to physical infidelity, can inflict as much, if not more, hurt pain and suffering into a marriage. Most infidelity, however, involves both physical and emotional unfaithfulness.

Opportunistic infidelity occurs when a partner is in love and attached to a partner but surrenders his/her sexual desire to someone else. According to the Wikipedia the opportunistic infidelity is drawn by irrepressible lust situation and or opportunity and sometimes pure risk taking behavior.

Obligatory Infidelity is based on the fear that refraining from someone's sexual advances will result in rejection or economic loss and being unwilling to handle such a situation results in surrender to that person. Some people end up cheating solely on the need for approval from somebody, even though they still hold a strong attraction to their committed partners.

Conflicted- romantic infidelity takes place when a person both falls in love with and has a strong sexual desire for multiple people at one time, even though he may already be committed to a partner. In this circumstance, the person feels he cannot tell his committed partner about what has happened, but is unable to resist the compulsion; this lack of open discussion is usually what separates conflicted romantic infidelity from things like a well-defined open relationship.

In object worship, the cheating partner neglects the relationship to focus on something else which could be work, sports, and study to the detriment of his love life. In addition to these forms of infidelity already discussed, there is parallel partnerships that are both sexual and emotional. According to Harrison (2009) this type of an affair can add fuzz to a flat relationship; similarly, if a partner or spouse is having an affair, he is probably doing it because he is missing something in his first relationship

#### 4.2. Causes of Marital Infidelity

Apart from the above theoretical explanations, other factors have also been identified by psychologists and marriage counselors to explain why spouses engage in extramarital affairs. The reasons preferred so far vary among individuals, nature of relationship, situations and environment thereby making it difficult to make accurate generalizations.

The above notwithstanding, from the Christian perspective marriage infidelity has been attributed primarily to the sin nature inherited from Adam. Man is a sinner by nature and lives in a very sinful world. Marital infidelity and many other destructive conditions exist because of sin. They exist because humans have decided that their ways are better than God's ways. They have decided that fulfilling their desires is more important than obeying and glorifying the creator of heaven and earth. Therefore, until that sin nature is addressed by the individual surrendering to the transforming power of Jesus Christ, man will be susceptible to sin.

Apart from the above key spiritual factor, other general factors responsible for infidelity in marriage have been identified. In this regard, dissatisfaction with the marriage due to one or several reasons is a key factor responsible for infidelity in a marriage. According to Swenson (2012), infidelity indicates that there is no effective way to communicate disaffection within the marriage.

Cohen (2012) has also stated that infidelity in marriage occurs when there is lack of emotional connection between couples due to negative interactions in a relationship. In addition, infidelity in marriage is an indication that something is missing from the relationship which a spouse is able to find elsewhere. In African societies, infidelity has been attributed to the incidence of childlessness. Indeed, many African marriages have collapsed due to this factor especially among men.

Specific reasons why men cheat on their spouses have also been identified by psychologists and marriage counselors. Some men cheat due to biological factors. They cannot just cope with the idea of strict monogamy. The idea of mating with just one woman for a lifetime is not just practicable with them. This is because such men experience that natural urge to spread their 'seed' hence they become promiscuous. Similarly, it has been found that some men cheat on their wives because of their internal make up, that is, who they are and what they desire at some points in their lives. Some men are driven by a powerful natural force to seek novelty and variety when it comes to sexual partners. There is more to this than just seeking pleasure; the desire to be liked and attract women is one of the most important significant ways through which men are able to validate their masculinity and sense of self worth.

Apart from the biological factors, some men experience loss of sexual desire for their wives after children have been born or even after witnessing their wives give birth. Another reason why men cheat is the breakdown of fun in the relationship. Some men in long-term relationship begin to sex as a routine and so they seek adventure and adrenaline rush elsewhere. Yet another reason for cheating among men is the need to conquer which is an ego thing among men. Some men will also seek sex outside of a marital relationship simply to see if they can do it.

Some men also cheat because their wives are simply not good enough in bed to keep them happy, excited and satisfied. In such situations the man will look for excitement and fun elsewhere. Also, some women have nothing else to offer their men except their beauty and sex. In such situations also, after getting enough sex from such women, men will realize that there is nothing else they can get and will be eager to get away from such women as soon as possible.

Other sundry reasons why men cheat on their spouses include lack of respect for the marriage vow; low morals, false sense of sexual life, falling out of love, living apart from their wives. Peer pressure, lack of respect for women and inability to manage offences.

Marriage counselors have found out that women cheat primarily for emotional connection. This is particularly true of women over the age of 30. In more than a few instances women may not cheat physically but they will have emotional affairs where they will fall in love and experience emotional intimacy with men, while never taking it to the physical level. This is this type of affair that can continue on for years without ever being detected and often leaving a wake of destruction in its path.

Studies have found that in long-term relationships women whether they work outside the house or not, often they “shut out” emotionally. As primary caregivers this leaves them little time for themselves to foster a woman’s natural urge to grow emotionally an urge typical ignored by men whose primary interest is physical contact.

Thus, the longing for a man who can “see who they really are” begins. And in the weeks, months or even years, they will usually find such a man-or think they have found one. An interesting point to take away of this female need for an “emotional bond”: affairs initiated by women generally last three times longer than those initiated by men.

Apart from the above reasons, women also cheat when they have low self esteem and a man shows up who compliments them, shows interest in them emotionally and tells them they are beautiful. Some women will also cheat to get back at husbands who cheated while others cheat because they are sexually deprived.

Infidelity among Nigerian women has been attributed to greed for materialism and loneliness which occurs when a woman feels she’s being taken for granted. The loneliness can create attraction and feelings for another man leading to infidelity. Some studies have proven that compared to men more women fall into extramarital affairs when they are not physically satisfied by their partners. Some do it for feel of excitement; need for love and romance and crumbling of self worth. However, marriage counselors say that if given the right love and respect some women will not think about cheating on their spouses but if cheating is for excitement and thrill, it may be difficult to stop.

#### *4.3. Consequences of Marital Infidelity*

Infidelity is one of the leading causes of marital failures and it can be a source of psychological trauma for the victims. For people who are highly emotional, they may never fully recover from the shock and its aftermath. In some societies especially in the Arab world, physical infidelity or adultery attracts capital punishment.

The Bible unequivocally condemns marital infidelity. This is because it utterly negates the sanctity of the marriage institution as earlier explained. Indeed there are several Bible passages that condemn physical infidelity (adultery). In the Old Testament, God’s seventh commandment to His people was, Thou shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:4). As the infinite God, Jehovah knew the heart of man that it was desperately wicked and as such would seek to fulfill every desire it craved for hence He gave this commandment to make His stand clear on the issue of adultery.

In Leviticus 20:10 God viewed adultery as being a terrible sin that it attracted capital punishment. And the man that committed adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committed adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. In I Corinthians 6:9-10 the Apostle Paul listed some sins if continued without confession and repentance, could hinder one from entering God’s kingdom. One of such sins is adultery. This further emphasizes how serious God view this sin. Hebrew 13:4 states that, marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, the prophets compared Israel’s going after other gods or idols instead of Jehovah as adultery or infidelity. In effect, God will hold the adulterer accountable if he does not repent. Adultery therefore affects one’s relationship with God as it causes disconnect between man and his maker.

Apart from the obvious spiritual implication of adultery, adultery leads to damage in self esteem. The person who has been cheated on will suffer a blow to his or her self esteem. He or she may struggle with the usual thought of “Am I not enough?”

Adultery also leads to lack of trust. The victim of an affair will find it difficult to trust again. He or she may doubt his or her judgment of others. Even if his relationship ends and another begins, the baggage of infidelity will follow.

Adultery can also lead to a sense of instability. The person who has been cheated on may feel his or her world has turned upside down. The precious thing in life that gave him or her sense of security has been shattered and it is normal to feel that the rug has been pulled from under his feet.

Marital infidelity can also lead to roller-coaster of emotions. The victim may in one minute feel like crying, the next screaming. And in this the blame game continues without end. Extra-marital affairs can also cause a ripple effect in the life of the adulterer. He may find himself looking differently at his job, friends, church members and life choices. In short, marital infidelity ruins marriages, friendship, family ties and destroys trust and respect.

#### *4.4. Coping with marital infidelity: the Hosea case study*

Hosea, one of the so called ‘minor prophets’ of the Old Testament gave his message in the eight century BC. He gave most of his messages to Israel, the country of the north. However, some were for Judah, the country of the South.

The book has many curses and blessings, but there are more curses than blessings. Hosea’s job was to tell his people that there was danger.

Marriage is a prominent theme in the book of Hosea. Indeed chapters 1 to 3 dwell heavily in this theme. God is portrayed in this book as a jealous husband (Chapter 2:1-13) due to the infidelity of his wife Israel (as symbolized by Gomer). Israel has played the harlot by flirting with pagan idolatry. God is also portrayed as a faithful and loving husband who longs for and is waiting to forgive Israel (Chapter 2:14-3:5; 9:1 and 14:4). And herein lies the first key to handling unfaithfulness in marriage- **forgiveness**.

The marriage theme is also closely allied to that of the covenant. Although God had redeemed his people out of Egypt and brought them into covenant relationship, with him, they have violated that covenant repeatedly. Israel's sole hope lay in the fact that God's covenant loyalty and redemptive love for them remained.

Due to Israel's violation of her fidelity to God and his covenant with them, there was need for repentance. Repentance therefore becomes a prominent theme in Hosea and the second key factor in handling unfaithfulness in marriage.

In the book of Hosea God therefore commands Hosea to take for himself a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms departing from the Lord? "(Ch 1:1). In compliance, Hosea marries Gomer, a prostitute the daughter of Doblam. From this marriage, Hosea had three children; Jezneel, Lo-Rohamah and Lo-Amimi.

One is immediately struck by concern that God is somehow a partaker of evil by giving Hosea such a command which appears to be clear violation of his standards as earlier discussed. However, because the fall context demands that Hosea's, experience was designed to be symbolic of God's relation with Israel, it would seem best that God tells Hosea to obtain a wife who like Israel would later prove to be unfaithful. This position allows Hosea's life situation to serve as a visible spiritual lesson for the people to whom he was called to minister.

Thus, as Gomer was Hosea's unfaithful wife, so spiritually Israel was God's adulterous wife. Also, just as Gomer had children which bore the taint of their mother's lifestyle, so individual Israelites were children of that covenant nation living in an atmosphere of spiritual infidelity.

Due to Israel's infidelity Hosea is commissioned to pronounce many messages of condemnation and warning. Nevertheless he will convey messages affirming that God's concern and love for his people remains through it all. Therefore, Hosea can also occasionally include words of hope for Israel's eventual restoration to God's favor. This will come, however, only after she has been properly chastised. Then a repentant people will once again enjoy the full benefits of its covenant relation with God.

Something of this was to be portrayed visibly to God's people through his prophet. Thus God's covenant relation to Israel was to be symbolized in Hosea's marriage to Gomer who will prove to be as unfaithful to her husband as Israel has been to Yahweh. Yet following her rebuke and chastisement, Gomer would find reconciliation with her husband.

If part of the sacred marriage contract states that couples shall live together 'for better or worse' then it is implied that marriage is not a bed of roses, The contract envisages that unpleasant things including marital infidelity could happen in a marriage. This being the case, a couple should be prepared to deal with such issues whenever they happen without necessarily breaking up the relationship.

As the Hosea story indicates, despite Gomer's infidelity, Hosea never stopped loving her. This symbolizes that Israel's infidelity notwithstanding, God never stopped loving his people. He was ever willing to forgive his people whenever they showed genuine repentance.

Although marital infidelity can be very painful and devastating, yet God's word in Psalm 103:9 states, He will not always chide; neither will keep his anger forever. This implies that the hurt and pain that follow the incidence of infidelity must not be allowed to ruin a marriage especially if the transgressor is willing to amend his or her wicked ways.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the Christian perspective, marriage is a sacred institution ordained by God at the beginning of creation for companionship and procreation. Because of its significance and sacredness, it is not to be entered into unadvisedly but after careful consideration of its implications. This is why it has been aptly stated that marriage is a responsibility in all respects.

As a responsibility, it is necessary to understand the principles, rights and obligations of Christian marriage. One of such crucial principles is sexual exclusivity which implies that extramarital affairs or adultery is forbidden in Christian marriage. Indeed, some churches accept adultery as the only basis for divorce.

Several reasons have been proffered to explain why spouses cheat or engage in extramarital affairs. However the main factor seems to be the sin nature of man. Man by nature is a sinner. This explains why the Bible states that, "How much more abominable and filthy is man which drinketh iniquity like water?" Therefore, until the sin nature is dealt with through a total surrender to the will of God, man will find it difficult to overcome sin. This is why some churches on the basis of II Corinthians 6: 14-16 teach that Christians aspiring to get married must first ensure that they are genuinely born again.

Although it is the duty of the church to maintain the highest possible standards of marital permanence and fidelity for its members, it has a crucial role to play to restore the spouse who has transgressed. Its role should be to show support and love by reconciling erring members and restore them back to fellowship through counseling, prayers and exhortations. In this regard, expulsion or excommunication should be the last option.

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