

**Some
Biblical Truths
About
MARRIAGE**



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FOREWORD

Please have a bible beside you as you read this book. Many bible references are given – don't just skim over them but take pains to look them up as they occur. You will then have a better and deeper understanding of what is being discussed.

Happy reading and God bless you!

The following **abbreviations** are used herein for various bible versions:

RSV	-	Revised Standard Version
KJV	-	King James Version
NIV	-	New International Version
NEB	-	New English Bible
DARBY	-	Holy Scriptures & New Testament Bible by J. N. Darby
KIT	-	Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures
GNB	-	Good News Bible

INTRODUCTION



Getting married and raising a family are among the greatest projects in people's lives, and the wedding day is one of the happiest days in a woman's life. Upon marrying, one considers that he or she has finally "settled down", and hopes for a blissful and successful married life.

Although there are some universal basics about marriage, yet actual marital practice and expectations vary from place to place, depending on the factors of culture and religion of the place. These factors have their good and bad aspects, and exert both positive and negative influences on marriages.

For instance, in most African cultures, the extended family and relatives-in-law exert substantial influence on marriages. This starts even before the marriage (e.g. in choice of spouse) and continues till after the marriage (e.g. in treatment of widows).

Even within the Christian religion, different denominations may make different requirements and regulations about marriages. Some of those demands and rules may not be truly biblical. The ignorant Christian may then fall victim to wrong doctrines and beliefs.

What, then, should inform a Christian's belief and practice amid these and other determining factors? Is it personal pride, socio-cultural expectations, or even denominational dogmas?

A Christian's allegiance is first and foremost to God. His overriding passion should be to do the perfect will of God. His guide, standard of belief and rule of conduct is the word of God. His actions should not be governed by personal pride or the expectations of men. Whenever public opinion is at variance with God's perfect will and truth, he should not fear to lose men's favour or suffer persecution, but should follow what God says.

That is why this piece aims to provide people with knowledge of what the bible actually says on certain aspects of marriage. This is not a conventional work on marriage – (there's plenty of that easily obtainable already!). It is also not exhaustive, for, no work can truly claim to write everything about marriage. This work only aims to highlight some of the more obscure biblical truths about marriage, and to expose the unbiblical aspects of some cultural practices, popular opinions and denominational demands on marriage, with a view to helping people avoid the pitfalls presented by them. Highlighting their unbiblical aspects without elaborating on their beneficial aspects does not mean that the author is biased and sees nothing good in them. The author recognizes and encourages everything godly and beneficial to marital success. However, biblical truths must be sought after because, according to John 8:32, "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".

CHAPTER ONE

ONENESS AND A NEW HOME



♡ *A New Home*

When God instituted the first marriage, in Genesis 2:24 we read that:

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” - KJV

A class of bible students was asked to summarize the above verse in just two words. The answers submitted were similar, and the winning entry was: “marital oneness”. This illustrates the fact that the latter part of the verse strikes people most.

However, the beginning of the verse also states a great truth. It says ‘a man will leave his father and mother’. This means that marriage implies the emergence of a new home, a full-scale independent entity – a home quite distinct from one’s previous native home, and which should be recognized as such.

Hence, marriage is not something to be jumped into anyhow. As you contemplate marriage, know very well that Genesis 2:24 says that God expects every man, on getting married, to set up his own home in which he himself as husband and father is the head.

Have your own home though it may be very poor. If neither you nor your spouse can afford the maintenance of a home, it means both of you were not truly ready for marriage

Two cocks, they say, cannot crow on the same roof. It is very disturbing to see the prevalence, in our society, of the ugly situation in which a dependent young man, still living with his parents, goes about and impregnates an equally dependent young woman, and she has to come and live with his family till she safely bears the child. (Incidentally, his family is one that is struggling to barely survive and the residence is already overcrowded).

Troubles soon arise when both the young man and the girl start to expect that she should be given special treatment as a “wife” and “expectant mother”. They then feel too big to submit to the authority of the poor parents who have had such unexpected burden foisted upon them; and only God knows what can develop from there. This is simply deplorable.

What of when parents are rich and can provide suitable accommodation for a newly properly wedded couple? This brings us to the fact that “house” and “home” are not the same thing. A home means much more than a house. Before remaining in such accommodation, one should consider the factors of proximity and independence. If it is too close to the

family house for your comfort, or if it compromises too much of your independence as a new family unit, then you better arrange for alternative accommodation. But if there's no problem, nothing prevents you from accepting such accommodation.

Respect your matrimony and appreciate the home you can provide yourselves, even though it may not have as many luxuries as has your parental homes. Remember, it takes time for people to become established and to acquire all that they may desire in life. Don't let anybody make you think that you are suffering because you married your spouse. Unwillingness or inability to leave the family house has been one of the contributing causes of troubles and eventual collapse of some marriages.

However, churches should not make extreme or rigid laws on this matter because, for example, God did not condemn it when Jacob lived as a family man in his father-in-law's house, cordially, for 13 years (i.e. twenty minus seven. See Genesis 31:41). But in all those years Jacob had the mind expressed in his question in Genesis 30:30. When tension mounted, God told him it was time to leave (Genesis 31:1-3).

The Western legal view of marriage is that it is a voluntary union between two people (the spouses) to the exclusion of all others. The African view is that the woman is married not only to her husband but to his family, and for that reason the family calls her "our wife". The biblical view as stated in Genesis 2:24 that "a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife" tends towards the Western legal view. Biblically, your spouse is to be the closest person to you. Don't let anyone interfere unnecessarily in your family matters whether it be your parents, siblings or any other relative. You are to love your spouse more than any other person and joyfully remain faithful to your spouse and build a strong family unit.

This new home is not just one spouse's home, but belongs to BOTH spouses. Husbands should realize that the bible, in many portions, says it is also the wife's household. She is a co-owner. (See Proverbs 31:15, 21, 27, Proverbs 14:1, and 1 Peter 3:7)

Does the statement in Genesis 2: 24 that "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" mean that on getting married, people should then forsake, despise, forget, disconnect from or disregard their parents and other relatives? No! No wife should ever use any means to try to make her husband do that. No husband or his kindred should ever try to force a wife to do that on the excuse that she had been "married out" from her parental family, and should no longer be of any good to them. That is unbiblical! The bible in Proverbs 30:11 frowns upon a generation that curses their father and does not bless their mother. And in 1 Timothy 5:4, it says plainly: "if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God". A good example of this is Joseph who was married (and with two sons) but did what is recorded in Genesis 47:12. However, even

in doing this, 1 Timothy 5:8 stresses that pre-eminent consideration goes to one's own immediate family. Your responsibility is first and foremost to your spouse and children.

Although the family and "in-law" problem has been disturbing many African marriages, yet the disconnection from, and abandonment of, one's family and relatives has been the bane of Western societies and marriages. Marriage, to them, has become something very easily entered into and very easily ended. On the other hand, it has been rightly averred by many that the background presence of family and relatives provides a stabilizing influence to African marriages in the sense of instilling respect and restraint, and playing advisory, supportive and arbitrate roles. It is believed that "what was picked up by the roadside can at any time easily be dropped by the roadside", as is happening in Western societies.

On the whole, couples must know the biblical truth about their marital home, and how not to permit or yield to the excesses of parental family or relatives-in-law.

♡ *One Flesh*

Let us now consider the latter part of Genesis 2:24 which states that the two (spouses) shall become "one flesh".

What does this mean, and how does it come about?

The bible has not left us to guess or hold differing opinions, but has given the answer plainly. 1 Corinthians 6:16 explains that the "one flesh" comes by sexual intercourse; such that having sex with a harlot still results in being "one flesh" with her, even though without marriage.

This goes to buttress the fact that sex before and out of marriage is a perversion: the Creator had intended that sex be experienced only within the confines of a marital union.

[In fact, in secular law a marriage is considered not yet consummated until the wedded couple has had sex. Also, in common usage, a person who even when married but stays for a very long time without sex is still called celibate].

Hence, dear Christian, don't use flimsy or unjust excuses to deprive your spouse of sex which God had designed to help strengthen marital bliss (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Proverbs 5:18-19).

I am NOT saying that oneness in marriage is all about sex. No! To be one and to be one flesh don't mean the same. Oneness is much wider, and being one flesh is just one aspect of oneness – an aspect which God intended only for spouses so as to make their oneness closer and stronger than all other forms of human oneness. Couples are enjoined to be of one heart, one love, one mind, one purpose, etc., but this same kind of oneness

is also generally enjoined on all Christians, even though all Christians do not become “one flesh” (Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 4:2-6, and 1 Peter 3:8).

What I’m pointing out is that in marriage the Bible says the two become one flesh, but does not extend it to the two becoming “one spirit”. It is only in union with Christ that a person is “one spirit” with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17). Here again, note that to be “one spirit with” is not exactly same as to “be in one spirit” or “in one mind” or “of same spirit” or to “have same heart”. All true Christians are only indirectly one spirit **in Christ** through their individually being one Spirit with Christ (Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:13).

If in marriage the two spouses become “one spirit”, how would it be possible for a couple to lie in bed and one would be taken and the other left? (Luke 17:34). Would God himself be separating two spirits whom he had joined together? Two people can become “one flesh”, yet one ends up in heaven and the other in hell.

Why do I bother to explain all these fine distinctions in terminology? It is to make known that marriage should never be used as the basis for forcing someone into any particular spiritual persuasion. I wish to condemn such statements as: “two different spirits will not operate in this house; either you join my way or this marriage will end”. Some husbands use such threats on their wives. Wife, do not succumb to any evil demand that would jeopardize your soul.

Also bad is the demand by some church denominations that a marriage is not acceptable if one spouse is not from the denomination, or that after wedding the spouse must come and belong to the denomination. That demand is not made in the Bible! It is merely a man-made condition imposed by the denominational hierarchy.

Undeniably, worshipping together has many advantages and great benefits for the home. It eliminates conflicts over spiritual views as well as over church attendance and activities. It also eliminates conflict over which religion the children will follow. It is rightly said that a family that prays together stays together. In addition to a physical bonding, a spiritual bonding takes place that promotes humility, sharing, compassion and love. Spiritual truths help couples transcend selfish desires and become part of a larger plan.

Be that as it may, God has not demanded that couples **MUST** belong to same denomination. It should be by the mutual understanding, agreement and convenience of the couple. The bible has not made it mandatory; hence, spouses and churches should not make it compulsory.

True, the bible says not to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-15), but to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). But what of marrying a believer in another denomination? Does the bible object to that? No! Surely, God has some true believers in the various true Christian churches all over the world; and no denomination should claim to be the best or only good church.

If, upon wedding, the couple must then belong to same denomination; which one? The husband's or the wife's? In practice, it is usually the husband's. But what makes the husband's denomination better than the wife's?

What if the woman has a big and successful ministry and it is God's will for her to marry a certain new believer in another denomination? Must she leave that ministry to go be a back-bencher in the husband's denomination? Isn't it most probable that God intends for the new believer (husband) to come grow up with her and help build her ministry?

It is usually said that the reason for the demand for relocation to husband's denomination is that the man is the head of the woman. This reason is being wrongly applied, as we shall see when we discuss 'headship' later on. The truth is that any unreasonable or dogmatic such demand reflects male chauvinism and a method of maintaining and swelling denominational membership.

It is important to note that oneness does not entail the total disappearance of individuality, independence and even some privacy. By 'independence' I do not mean 'being separate and on your own'. I mean a spouse still being respected as an entity that has its own thoughts, feelings, preferences, talents, flair and that should be capable of self-expression, decision-making and voluntary action. One of the offshoots of the idealistic fanciful views about oneness is the proposition that a couple cannot have separate personal bank accounts but must have only a joint account. The Bible has NOT imposed or recommended such a thing, and the thing has not been truly working. This does not mean you cannot have a joint family business, where possible. And, for such business to succeed you should try and ensure that it is run as a business with accountability, without letting sentiment bring it down.

CHAPTER TWO

HEADSHIP AND SUBMISSION



♡ *Headship*

The Bible teaches that God has given the man a position of headship over the woman (See Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 11:3, Genesis 3:16). However, it is not that every man is head over every woman. It is only a husband and wife arrangement. It simply means that the husband is the head in his **household**. It does not go beyond that. In Nigerian Pidgin English, it is usually said: “*every man na oga for him own house*” (meaning, “every man is master in his own house”).

God gave man the headship over woman in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:16. What were God’s actual words? “And thy desire shall be to thy **husband**, and **he** shall rule over thee”. Did God say a woman’s desire shall be to every man, and every man shall rule over her? No. God said “Husband”. God was addressing a wife and her husband!

Man, you are not ‘superior’ to any woman – not even your wife! You have your qualities as a man and the woman has hers as a woman. Man and woman are complementary to each other, and have their various roles in God’s creation.

This complementarity is well captured in the popular joke that says a lecturer once asked his English class to correctly punctuate the sentence: “*woman without her man is incomplete*”. All the male students punctuated it as “*Woman, without her man, is incomplete.*” while the females punctuated it as “*Woman! Without her, man is incomplete.*”

You see, both ways of punctuation state two great truths that together give the complete picture.

In Genesis 2:18, when God said “I will make him a help meet for him”, He did not mean a servant but a suitable partner, his counterpart. The woman is not ‘inferior’ or less important.

These are not just feminist views, they are biblical truths!

The Bible argues in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 that if you feel women are ‘inferior’ to men because the woman came out from the man (his rib), then you should equally feel that men are now ‘inferior’ to women because men now come out from women (their wombs). However, the bible says all such contentious comparison is unnecessary because men and women all come from God (being equally His creatures).

Many bible expositors take special note of the plural pronoun “them” in Genesis 1:26, 27, 28, and explain that the word “man” in these verses really means “mankind”, and point out that these verses show that the female was equally created in God’s image as the male.

So, for instance, if you work in an office and a woman is your senior officer and you disrespect her, thinking that “after all, women are inferior

to men”, know that God does not support you because your idea is quite unbiblical. God has made man to be head only in his family when he marries.

And, surely, the headship does not extend to “spiritual”. The one and only spiritual Head of all Christians (male or female) is Christ. (see Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 5:23, Ephesians 4:15). If a husband is the spiritual head of his wife, what then of born-again wives of unbelieving and un-repentant husbands? It would mean those wives have no spiritual heads.

The only humans considered as ‘sub spiritual heads’ are ministers to whom Christ has given the oversight of His flock, and who are accountable to Christ the Chief Shepherd. (1 Peter 5:1-4).

No husband has the right to forcefully control or dictate the spirituality of the wife, or to coerce her into evil way. Any attempt by a husband to prevent a wife from serving God or exercising her spiritual gifts is an overstepping of his mandate – an abuse of privilege by using headship to oppose the One who gave him the headship. Husbands should not forget the Supreme Head to whom they themselves ought to be subject.

Unfortunately, trust human beings to take undue advantage of any privilege given them! Many an African man considers that being the head implies the woman has no head or brain to think with; he must think, plan and decide everything for the woman, who must not say anything or hold any view but simply follow him like a robot. This is unbiblical! It is a pity that many men are falling in life the world over simply because of not listening to their wives! This is a sad reality which does not please God.

Sure, the Bible says wives should be submissive to their husbands. However, it does not say the wives are servants or slaves. Rather, it says wives are co-heirs with their husbands and should be treated with due respect by husbands (1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, Colossians 3:19, Ephesians 5:28-29). Indeed, generally, all Christians are enjoined to respect each other in a spirit of humility, and to be very godly in their exercise of powers. (1 Peter 5:3-5, Ephesians 5:21, Philippians 2:3, 1 Peter 3:8, Matthew 20:25-28, Colossians 4:1)

In true love and godliness, marriage is an equal partnership. A husband shouldn’t think his business is none of his wife’s business, but they should share their daily activities with each other as well as their hopes for the future. His wife ought to be involved in the family finances, planning and decisions.

However, it must be commented here that it is the nature and attitude of some women that have hampered the practice of openness and sharing. It is shocking how some women are so power-hungry and money-minded, yet lacking in planning. Their husbands, after learning their lessons the hard and bitter way, regret all the initial love, openness, simplicity and trust they had shown to such wives, and solemnly decide to turn hard lest they end up as toys tied to the apron strings of such wives.

Wife, please pray God to take away from you every scheming, possessive and domineering tendency. Your matrimonial home is surely not where to display and uphold such character. It is a place for sincerity and cooperation, not a place for trickery and frivolous expenditure.

A husband is responsible for the leadership in his own immediate family – his wife and children. However, the God-type leadership is not heavy-handed, authoritarian or dictatorial. Authoritarian leadership destroys a home rather than build it up. An authoritarian is unyielding, tyrannical, not understanding, and represses; while a good leader manages, motivates, teaches, inspires and influences, and thereby obtains willing cooperation toward a mutual goal.

Husbands, please do well and hence **earn** the admiration and respect of your wives. Don't rather try to forcefully claim it through various forms of ill-treatment and manipulation. You can and should regain it by doing well if you are the one who lost it through misbehaviour and failures.

Spouses, be careful how you treat your partners because an emotionally battered and unappreciated person who finds understanding and tenderness somewhere would **naturally** be responsive to it and, before long, various sins could start getting in.

It is sad to see some husbands who, in their bid to keep their wives as powerless, helpless, totally dependent 'prisoners', force the wives not to do anything to have personal money because they know that money is power. That is very unchristian. Theirs is not a love relationship but a master-servant arrangement. No human being should exist merely as an object passing through time. Life is meant to be actually 'lived' – and that meaningfully! An adult, male or female, ought to have some power of independent spending. It is necessary for your spouse to have some personal financial strength while you have yours too, and you together build your home.

Loving husbands do not scheme to thwart, disable and subjugate their wives. They rather try to empower and uplift them, either by helping them to further their education, vocation or career; or by setting up businesses for them. I know several rich and powerful persons who have used their influence to make their wives become commissioners, ministers, senators, etc.

Restricting a wife from income-making activities may work only when the husband is very wealthy and ALWAYS supplies her with AMPLE money to satisfy her needs and wants, without requiring the rendering of accounts. However, even such situations can still be stifling to some women who have enterprising spirit.

Some husbands impose such restrictions on their wives but with the aim of 'shielding' or 'checking' them. However, such 'overprotection' is no guarantee for fidelity since a wife who wishes can misbehave even with her domestic servant, chauffeur, gardener, gatekeeper, etc. Only the fear of

God and true love for the Saviour can ultimately keep someone from willfully sinning.

♡ *Submission*

The Bible states in many places that wives should be submissive to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22, 33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1, 5, 6). In God's great wisdom He has planned that a family live in peace and righteousness. He chose the man to be the head of the home, and He made the woman to help her husband. Wives, see that you respect and revere your husbands, esteem and venerate them.

Notice that, usually, when God tells husbands to love their wives, he first tells the wives to honour their husbands. (See Colossians 3:18-19, Ephesians 5:22-25, and 1 Peter 3:1, 5, 6, 7). This portrays God's knowledge of the fact that a husband will never truly love a wife who does not respect, adore, and admire him as a true man, her hero.

A woman with strong control qualities, who thinks her husband is weak, who bucks his attempts to assume leadership, ignores his wishes, always nags, complains and is dissatisfied with all he does; is surely signing for a loveless marriage. Repeatedly being disdained, disregarded and insulted surely spoils a man's heart.

Also, why does God usually say "submit to your husbands", instead of "love your husbands"? This, again, portrays God's knowledge of the fact that a woman's genuine and willing submission to a man is a measure of how truly she loves him and considers him deserving of her. Any woman who knows her worth and truly values herself will not like to lovingly submit to a wimpish, stupid, wishy-washy, nauseating failure that she thinks does not deserve her or her respect. (Note that we're here not talking about a short-lived thing done for pleasure or material gain. We're talking about a sincere thing in which two people understand that they will be spending all their lives together).

Hence, a woman who by one means or other succeeds to have her husband totally under her control would eventually despise him and find him unlovable. In her **natural** longing for a 'real' man, she may have one outside that she sees to be man enough and attracts her admiration and respect; or she may fall victim to various preying wolves.

As the years go by, the strong-willed, independent, controlling woman (no matter how rich, successful and comfortable) becomes disenchanted and wishes for someone she could dependably lean on, some assertive person under whom she could securely and happily operate.

The biblical truth is that notwithstanding a husband's personality flaws, the wife should still show him due respect. A woman who has reasons to find it difficult to respect her husband can learn to differentiate

between her husband's personality and his position. It is possible to respect his position while recognizing personal deficiencies that need correction. Maybe, treating him as he is might make him become worse, but treating him as if he were what he ought to be might make him become what he ought to be. A wife's continued respect, good life, prayer and God's power can eventually get him improved (1 Peter 3:1-2). A wife ought to desire the very best God has for her husband, and she ought to realize that God expects her to be a "help meet" that will help him to be that success.

However, how submissive a wife ought to be to her husband is always qualified in each of the scripture passages that talk about it.

Colossians 3:18 says it should be "*as it is **fit** in the Lord*".

Ephesians 5:22 says it should be "*as unto the Lord*".

Ephesians 5:24 says it should be "*as the church is subject to Christ*"

1 Peter 3: 6 says it should be "*as long as ye do **well** and are **not afraid** with any amazement*".

All these qualifying phrases show that it should be a type that pleases God. It should not be a sheepish, unconditional submission that reeks of ignorance, timidity and enslavement. It should not be one produced by oppression, deprivation, intimidation, marginalization or manipulation. Biblically, submissiveness should not be dread or passivity.

No wife should ever submit to an ungodly demand by her husband, nor should she abet him in wrongdoing. Any wife who supports evil is trying to build the house the wrong way, and may eventually fail (Read Psalm 127:1 and Matthew 10:39).

Still on this issue of submissiveness, it is important to mention the aspect of **sex**. The bible is quite plain about this in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. No spouse should ever use sexual deprivation or brutality as a weapon against a spouse. Notice that the commandment in this bible passage is 2-way. That is, **BOTH** spouses have this right over each other, and **BOTH** spouses are told to accept and fulfill this duty to each other.

If a husband feels he can authoritatively demand this right and even use his physical strength to forcefully obtain it when the wife was not so disposed; what of when it is the other way round? Would the wife command him? Would he yield to her? Would she be able to force him? Rather, she would strive to please him, attract him and arouse him. That is how it should be!

True love and godliness are key factors here. An adage rightly says that "kissing goes by favour". Sexual matters like arousal and satisfaction are not only physical but also sensitive emotional issues, which need love as foundation. They cannot come by force of authority, but are to be lovingly and skillfully nurtured.

True love for each other and for God will make it easy for a couple to mutually consent as to when to refrain from sex. For example, if a wife had just returned from a delicate surgery and needs some time to get well, it would be very unloving and wicked for a husband to insist on anything

that would damage her health. Another good example is a testimony of victory that was given by a certain woman minister at a marriage seminar. She had once been given a very important 7-day fasting and abstinence period by God. But, alas, that was the very time the Devil decided to bring all sexual urges upon her. It took the understanding, maturity and firmness of her husband (a fellow gospel minister who also knew about that will of God) for them to escape erring and ruining God's plan for them.

Love the Lord your God, love your spouse as yourself, fear God and keep his commandments, and you'll escape many conflicts and problems.

Though much has been said in this chapter to educate men to not go beyond the biblical meaning and limits of 'headship', nothing herein contained should be misconstrued by a wife as a basis for her to develop confrontational attitudes towards her husband.*

*** Footnote:**

For further reading on matters of the husband's headship and the wife's submissiveness, you can also see chapters 2 and 3 of Kenneth Hagin's book: "The Woman Question" (2nd Edition), published by RHEMA Bible Church, Tulsa, U.S.A

RECOGNITION AND FORMALIZATION



♡ *Recognition*

When does God see a relationship to be a marriage?

The biblical answer to this may surprise many people. In Deuteronomy 22:23-24 we read that a betrothed girl is **already** considered a **wife**. In the New Testament, Mary, although only betrothed to Joseph, was already called his wife (Matthew 1:18, 20, 24). Deuteronomy 20:7 again affirms this truth, and in Leviticus 19:20-22 we see that it still held even for slaves not yet redeemed.

Hence, from God's point of view, an **engagement** is binding. Once there is that mutual promise, commitment and agreement to marry, which has been made known to family or church or friends/community, God sees the couple as **belonging** to each other **exclusively**. Any third party affair is no longer mere fornication but full-scale adultery (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). THIS IS NO JOKE! Before God, it is NOT payment of bride price or wedding ceremony that marks the commencement of a marriage.

Some people (and their families) believe they can cunningly suck various benefits from others through deceitful engagements, and later jilt the fellows when they are through with the scheme. They think they are smart, but nobody can outsmart God who sees such jilting on the level of "unlawful breakup of marriage". They shall reap what they sow (Galatians 6:7).

Concerning engagement, what do we mean by the words "agreement" and "made known"? We mean that both parties must have definite intent and commitment to marry each other, which have been clearly expressed in a solemn **proposal** and **acceptance**. This is a settled matter, not something in which one party is still trying to woo or get into the life of the other party. It is beyond courtship.

Also, it is no longer something between them which others just 'see' or 'hear about'. It is an intention which has been appropriately made known to people. To family, it can be made known purely verbally or also accompanied with customary gifts. To church, it should be through the pastor who would announce it to the congregation. To community, it can be through an engagement party.

At this point, if they wish they can wear engagement rings for public identification and as reminder of their solemn commitment.

In bible days, after the betrothal the maiden sometimes could even go and live with her ‘husband’, awaiting the time of completion of the full wedding rites. For example, Mary lived with Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-27 and 2:3-5). However, the standard practice was that the groom would collect the girl from her home on the wedding day proper.

In some African cultures, the betrothed girl would go live with her intended mother-in-law for a period of time meant for ‘character study’, further instruction and reorientation.

All this is quite different from a situation in which two people cohabit without any definite mutual commitment to marriage. It may be a one-sided thing in which the woman is striving tooth and nail to enter the man’s life. She shamelessly moves in and stays with him to secure the enjoyment of amorous and socio-economic benefits. She may try hard to get pregnant for him and may even succeed. All the while, the man, who understands all her plans but does NOT share in them, decides to take advantage of the ‘desperate’ person throwing herself at him, and keeps feeding her with lies. Thus they continue in their sinful affair full of deception and intrigue until they finally part ways in shameful and hurtful circumstances, no marriage having come out of it.

It is also different from the practice in which two people carry on with no intention or hope to marry, but just to benefit symbiotically. The man is usually well-to-do and may even have a wife at home. This other woman is content with being housed elsewhere and is proud to bear children for a wealthy father who amply provides for them and her. She knows and refers to this man-friend not as her husband but as the “father of my children”, and he refers to her not as wife but as “a certain woman who has borne some children for me”. The woman is just a mistress, not even a concubine who has some little recognition in polygamous settings. Moreover, even concubinage is contrary to the Christian concept of monogamous marriage. Sadly, our society shows acquiescence in the sinful practice of such mistresses and considers it a matter of socio-economic expediency.

Can you believe that a prophecy was issued in a long-standing and widely established church in Nigeria that all unmarried members should find one equally unmarried lover and stick to or cohabit with, so as to curb the rate of adultery in the church?

Such a “prophecy from God” opened the floodgates and there’s now hardly any member who hasn’t a lover, especially the anxious middle-aged unmarried, divorced or separated members. There is no serious commitment or intention to marry in almost all of these relationships. The mates just see each other as the “one” chosen lover.

Inevitably, these relationships are frustrating and enslaving to most of the women, who, after some time of fruitless suffering, break up and seek for yet another “one” partner, and the cycle continues.

However, the truth is that all such partnership or cohabitation blocks the way for the good thing God would have given them had they kept themselves and prayerfully waited for him!

Why on earth should a church accept such a prophecy as being from God, and then issue it as church policy which is being practiced in all branches of the church till today? Have abstinence and self-control become totally impossible and out-of-place in these end-times?

Of course, that policy helps that church to retain many old members and attract new members who desire to go and enjoy such permissive policy. Yet, it is sin!

The three situations that have been described above are a mockery of, and a far cry from, the noble institution of marriage and marital home intended by God.

Read in John 4:5-43 about the woman of Samaria and how Jesus exposed the sinfulness of her cohabitation. She repented that day and became the instrument for leading many Samaritans to Christ. If you are living the way she did, please repent. Cohabitation is not the right way to ensure getting married or to secure survival in harsh socio-economic situations. It rather prevents you from receiving your good blessing from God. Withdraw from sinful living, and God can greatly turn things around for you just like He did for her or for Mary Magdalene who had been of easy virtue, but from whom Christ expelled seven demons (Luke 7:36-50, Luke 8:1-2, John 12:1-8, Mark 14:3-9).

*H*owever, when a man and woman have lived devoted to each other for long, and they and their families and the community understand that they are ‘married’, and may have some children between them (even though the man has not yet performed the due marriage rites), God recognizes them as husband and wife. It is God’s will that they should formalize their marriage as soon as possible by fulfilling all due marital rites.

Nevertheless, even before complete formalization, God still recognizes such marriage. For instance, in Genesis 29:27-30, Laban gave out Rachel in marriage to Jacob when her bride price of 7 years of service was yet unpaid. They were fully married while he was serving the 7 years. Within those seven years sin was not imputed, God recognized the union. (But note that it was all with Rachel’s parental agreement and arrangement).

In cases of long-standing marriages, churches should have the attitude expressed by Saint Peter in Acts 10:44-48. That is, churches should not have poor regard for what God himself recognizes. Churches should not refuse the formalization of such unions. If the occasion cannot be called a wedding ceremony, it can be called a “marriage blessing”, as is being done in some churches.

Before proceeding further, can we examine the sensitive issue of sex before marriage in the case of ENGAGED couples? First of all, let us reiterate the fact that in God's perfect will, sex, by which two persons become "one flesh", is to be experienced only within a marital union. Secondly, in the bible we see that well-meaning and God-fearing people reserved the act until after wedding. Examples are Boaz (Ruth 3:9-13 cum Ruth 4:13), Joseph and Mary who were engaged (Matthew. 1:18, 25).

On the other hand, we also see that seducing, or even raping, an unbetrothed maiden attracted no punishment or death sentence, but only meant that the two **MUST** marry (Deuteronomy 22:28-29, Exodus 22:16-17), because by that act they had already joined themselves to be 'one flesh'. Now, if such a thing happens between engaged persons who are already considered as husband and wife and are bound to marry, will it be the most terrible sin for which a church must somehow punish them, either by postponing their wedding or suspending them from church?

Hence, it was rather unfortunate when, recently, a popular church in Nigeria's delta region cancelled a scheduled wedding ceremony after all elaborate arrangements had been made. Above two months earlier, the couple had completed all the necessary rites and had a full traditional marriage at which the bride's family had duly given their daughter's hand in marriage to the groom before the whole community. When it was time for the church wedding, a medical test indicated that the bride was about seven weeks pregnant for the groom. The church saw this as a gigantic transgression and cancelled the whole wedding plan and suspended the couple from church, not minding the public embarrassment and huge financial losses the couple would suffer, and not minding the fact that they were fully traditionally married!

Wasn't such an action quite high-handed? Certainly it was unbiblical! Full traditional marriage is recognized by God, by all spirits, and by the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The couple had even gone beyond engagement and had become bona fide husband and wife. What then could rightfully debar them from having sex?

(Recall that, biblically, even if the man had impregnated an unbetrothed virgin, his only penalty would have been for him to go on and marry her!).

Such unbiblical pharisaical regulations and actions by some churches are reminiscent of the type condemned by God in Ezekiel 13:22, and by Jesus in Matthew 23:24 and Matthew 12:7. They are capable of driving the innocent aggrieved souls away from Christ and into the waiting arms of the Devil.

After all, only very few marriages (if any) in this world were perfect in all things at their beginnings. The Bible even discloses that one of the

things in the world that passeth human understanding is “the way of a young man with a maid” (Proverbs 30: 18- 19). If God were to demand strict pharisaical perfection, don’t you know that the beginnings of the marriages of most ministers of God would not be adjudged to have been flawless?

Consider the following renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:36.

“If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry – It is no sin” (RSV)

“But if any man thinks that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry”. (KJV)

“But if a man has a partner in celibacy, and he feels he is not behaving properly towards her, if, that is, his instincts are too strong for him, and something must be done, he may do as he pleases; there is nothing wrong in it; let them marry”. (NEB).

What is that misbehaviour that usually results from strong uncontrollable passions between engaged persons? The above quotations, of course, clearly urge engaged persons to get married when they cannot refrain from “misbehaviour”. But do these quotations also sound somehow **concessionary** for engaged persons? Or would that be too liberal? Whatever your shade of opinion, formally engaged persons should not forget the law that ‘making it’ attracts INEVITABLE marriage!

About this matter, many people have expressed concern over the possibility of an innocent Christian maiden being engaged to a completely impotent man (or even a eunuch); she faithfully observes the puritan ethic of “no sex or petting before wedding”, only to discover on her wedding night the terrible predicament she’s been entrapped into.

Some people may argue that this is merely hypothetical, but believe you me there are many actual situations that are almost (if not altogether) like this, in which the wives live trapped and frustrated lives, ever wishing they had had an inkling of the sad truth before tying the knot.

What then is the fate of such persons? What options are open to them in view of the fact that only sexual immorality and desertion are the biblical grounds for divorce?

The above situation reminds us of the scenario presented to Jesus in Mark 12:18-27 and his answer that “ye err, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God” (verse 24). He told them that their coming up with such scenario revealed their ignorance of the ways of God.

Likewise for our present issue of the entrapped spouse. It exposes the great need for us to know and follow God through and through, not just going halfway. The harm in knowing and following God only halfway is as highlighted in the nursery rhyme titled ‘The Grand Old Duke of York’,

which explains that when one is only halfway up a hill, then one is neither “up” nor “down”. See also Revelation 3:15-16.

Our unfortunate sister knew to keep the ethics of Puritanism during engagement, but knew not how to hear from God and know His perfect will. Had she (or those who arranged, accepted and formalized such marriage) been able to truly hear from God, He would have told her (or them) that it was not His perfect will, or revealed to them that all was not well and she should not accept or else she would regret.

God does not give His children scorpion when they need fish, nor stone when their real need is bread (Luke 11:9-13).

But any perfect will of God as ordered by Him should be accepted with faith similar to Abraham’s, who believed that God would raise a dead Isaac back to life when he would obey God and sacrifice his dear Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19).

It is true that when dealing with humans one should be careful not to take things for granted. For instance, one should inspect and test a product before buying it, otherwise one would be buying blindly and some unscrupulous fellows can thus get one to part with one’s money for some worthless products.

However, our all-knowing God is not blind but knows the state and value of every person. Also, He never gives worthless products (Luke 11:9-13). Patiently waiting on Him, **truly** hearing from Him, knowing His **perfect** will and obeying Him would prevent his obedient children from getting trapped in regrettable situations.

This fear is not only one-sided. The men too would want to look before they leap, most especially as no African man can plan for a childless (first) marriage. Hence, the man’s desire to “make sure” of the woman’s fertility before committing himself by tying the knot. This, again, reflects a lack of truly hearing from God. If a man truly heard from God and was sure of God’s perfect will about a marriage ever **before** proposing, then he shouldn’t exhibit doubt but should know that God cannot will evil for His children, and that God foresees and knows all things and can solve problems, if any, that may need to be solved. After all, many have been doing the preliminary testing (or, is it rather *tasting*?) but still have problems later. What if, after all attempts, nothing is forthcoming and you decide to **part ways**? How would you then justify yourself before God concerning all what had been taking place? Remember, ‘making it’ attracts inevitable marriage, and engagements are binding.

♡ *Formalization*

Even though God recognizes a marriage as having begun right from the betrothal, God clearly demands that marriages should still be formalized in the appropriate ways.

God places the burden of doing this upon the man. In bible times this involved payment of bride price, presentation of gifts and a wedding ceremony (Deuteronomy 22:29, Exodus 22:16-17, Genesis 24:53-54, Genesis 34:11-12, Judges 14:2,10; John 2:1-10). The bride price could be in money (Deuteronomy 22:29), in kind (1 Samuel 18:25-26) or in service (Genesis 29:20-30).

Today, marriage formalization could be done traditionally or in church or in court.

This formalization is important and will sort out many problems and put many things right spiritually and physically. (For instance, even when the choice of spouse may not originally have been God's perfect will, it later becomes his **permissive** will upon formalization.

However, be sure that the marriage and family will suffer the inescapable consequences of the spouse not having originally been God's perfect choice.

It happened between David and Bathsheba. The beginning was bad, but in 2 Samuel 12:24-25 we see that God later gave "God's beloved" Jedediah, God's chosen heir and temple-builder, the wise king Solomon, through that same Bathsheba.

However, we know the many things David and his family suffered as consequences of his original wrong move).

Fulfilling one's obligations to the bride's family is essential. The idea of eloping and tying the nuptial knot somehow somewhere is not good, and should be avoided as much as possible. God said to pay the bride price to a girl's father (Deuteronomy 22:29, Exodus 22:16-17, examples Genesis 24:53-54, 1 Samuel 18:27), not to Church or State. God does not say you should give Him what you should rightly give to man (Mark 7:9-13, Mark 12:17). Try and satisfy the bride's family's minimal requirements.

Don't deceive yourself and refuse to give the **alcoholic** drinks they may require. The right of demand is theirs. [Even the foreskins of Philistines were given by David to Saul as he required, 1 Samuel 18:25-26]

You are only a guest who has gone to somebody's house to request for something (i.e. a bride). You cannot and should not dictate; the highest thing you can do is to peacefully **negotiate**. Whatever type and amount of drinks the family finally happily agrees on, you give it to them.

You did not go there to offend people or to lay down problems for your intended matrimonial life. (We Africans know very well the serious problems a matrimonial home can face due to some initial family dissatisfaction and grievance!).

In our South-Eastern Nigerian cultures, the bride's FAMILY is the host in the traditional marriage ceremony. What happens there tells much about that family. The groom, his family, the Church and even the bride herself have no right to dictate to the bride's parents and family how they should host their guests. For instance, suppose the bride's father is a traditional ruler: would you expect him to disgrace himself before his

guests and community by not serving the kinds of foods and drinks necessitated by the customs and traditions of his community? The bible has not empowered the Church to present a stumbling block or dilemma or embarrassing situation to families concerning the drinks for such occasions.

On the other hand, the groom and his family host the reception after the Christian white wedding (in South-East Nigeria). This time around, the groom and bride usually have a great say in how things go, and can plan their reception to take the shape they want. (Even if you don't hold any reception, you have not sinned!). You give your guests what you can offer, depending on your choice, beliefs and resources. Any self-respecting guest should be understanding enough and appreciate what the host can offer. You may decide not to serve any alcoholic drink or you may decide to serve it in moderation to prevent drunkenness; but there is **no** biblical injunction that you must not serve any of it!

Moreover, the groom's parents and family, while respecting the couple's wishes, may like to entertain their own guests in their own way, even if it means holding the reception in two sections if they can afford it. The couple should not oppose them and, indeed, should also grace that other section with its presence since it is held in its honour.

Let me here digress a little and explain from the Bible some things about use of alcoholic drinks:

The word "wine" has never in history meant non-alcoholic fruit drink. The following portions, for example, show that, as used in the Bible, it did not mean unfermented 'fruit juice', but referred to something that could intoxicate: Genesis 9:20-21, Genesis 19:33, 1 Samuel 1:14, Ruth 3:3, Proverbs 23:29-35, Hosea 4:11, Acts 2:13-15, Ephesians 5:18, Psalm 78:65.

Be aware, also, that offering of strong wine was poured to God twice daily right in the temple (Numbers 28:7-8); Priests and Levites received first fruits and tithes of new wine (Numbers 18:12). Did they throw them away? God even permitted Levites and other people to drink new wine or strong drink right in His presence! (Deuteronomy 14:23, 26); Melchizedek and Abram used wine (Genesis 14:18-20); to plant vineyards but be unable to drink their wine was a punishment (Zephaniah 1:13, Amos 9:14, Isaiah 62:8-9); wine is used in Holy Communion (Mark 14:23-25); Jesus turned water into wine at a marriage feast for people to drink (John 2:1-11). That is, Jesus provided wine for people to drink. Are you holier than Jesus? Jesus even said that He himself drank wine (Read about it in Luke 7:33-34).

The bible does not say that people should never take wine if the need arises or the occasion demands (1 Timothy 5:23, 2 Samuel 16:2, Proverbs 31:6-7). Only Nazirites were not to taste wine (Numbers 6:1-20, Judges 13:7, Luke 1:15-17). That

statement at the end of Numbers 6:20 clearly reveals that Jehovah allowed non-nazirites to drink wine. However, priests were not to drink wine whenever they were about to go officiate in the temple (Leviticus 10:8-10).

What the bible really demands is that (i) people should not get drunk (Ephesians 5:18; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Galatians 5:21; 1Corinthians 6:10; Luke 21:34 Romans 13:13, Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35), and (ii) even light drinking should not become habitual (1 Timothy 3:8, Titus 2:3, Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 31:4-5; 1Corinthians 6:12). A Christian should not stay and have a desire for a drink like people stay and have a desire for ice-cream or other kinds of food.

Please don't misunderstand me. I do not encourage alcohol abuse, nor does the bible! I am stressing that non-use of alcoholic drinks at wedding feasts is NOT a biblical injunction and has never been. It is only a denominational dogma, and has been causing problems for many people. When having a Church wedding, do what that Church says; but when in the family, give the kind of drinks that family (or community) demands. It is no sin!

*A*s earlier stated, engagements must involve both partners appropriately making their mutual intentions and commitment known to people. However, it sometimes happens that parents, for various reasons, may reject it when informed. This ought to be handled carefully. The intending couple must understand that every good parent wants the very best for their children and would try to prevent anything they think might jeopardize their children's future.

It pays to weigh parental advice; it may save one from being manipulated or stampeded into something that would turn out to be regrettable or short-lived.

Parental opposition should not be met with rashness, insults, scandal, elopement or severance of family ties. The partners should view it as one test of their true love. By humility, good conduct, gentle persuasion, perseverance, prayer and the power of God the parents may eventually acquiesce (Proverbs 25:15; Proverbs 15:1; 1 Peter 3:15-17; 1 Peter 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:23; 1 Peter 5:5-7).

Parents should not be too rigid or rash in these matters. After all, the fact remains that we will not marry our children, and that Genesis 2:24 should be fulfilled in their lives at some time or other. Though we desire the best for our children, yet what we feel is best may sometimes be different from what God knows to be best. Who knows tomorrow? While doing our best to give them the best in life, we should not overreact when our grown up children hold opinions different from ours. You must accept that at some point in life your child is no longer the baby you once held in your arms but has become a young adult. Only God should have the final

say on choice of spouse. God apart, the individuals themselves have the final say. It is still true that ‘you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink’. Please, handle things carefully and don’t let the issue of your child’s marriage cause an irreparable rift in your family!

(It is sad to see some parents curse, ostracize or even disown their child who happens to be with an unplanned pregnancy. They make it look as if their child were the worst child or offender in the whole universe. Surely, that one “mistake” is not the end of the world for your child! I know some happy and successful marriages that had initially resulted from such beginnings. Even if a marriage does not ensue, do you know the future of that coming child? Do you know tomorrow? (See Judges 11:1-11). Can anybody claim to know ALL of God’s hidden will? Who knows the intricacies of the gracious will of the all-wise God and the power and marvelous workings of Him who is ever bringing good from ill? God is still moving in mysterious ways His wonders to perform among men. I am not trying to encourage immorality, laxity or indiscipline. We should guide and discipline our children, but we should not CRUCIFY them! We should not forget that we too made some blunders in our early days.)

In some cases the plans and choices of parents may run contrary to God’s perfect will for their children. In fact, God’s reason and plan for a marriage may at times be so different from the normal human plans and expectations. It may be far from being ‘desirable’ or ‘enjoyable’ according to human standards. It may be for spiritual reasons like soul salvation, gospel ministry, God’s purposes, etc., which are more important before God than physical things like good looks (Proverbs 31:30, 1 Samuel 16:7), age differential (Jeremiah 1:4-8, Ecclesiastes 12:1; 1 Timothy 4:12), educational level (Job 32:8-9) and socio-economic status (Luke 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Psalm 15:4a, Hebrews 11:24-27).

An example is God’s perfect will and directive that Hosea marry adulterous, unfaithful Gomer (Hosea 1:2-9, Hosea 3:1-3). Surely such marriage couldn’t be ‘desirable’ or ‘enjoyable’ to Hosea, but he knew and loved God enough to do God’s perfect will despite all the opprobrium he might have got from Jews who neither saw any sense in such a “will of God” nor believed that Hosea could have received such a directive “from the Lord”. Hosea accepted being the vessel for that purpose of God.

Do you think that TODAY some of God’s perfect will and purpose cannot appear so ‘ODD’ like the Hosea-Gomer family? (Isaiah 55:8-9).

It may happen that parents may ultimately still fail to agree to your marriage (1 Corinthians 2:14, Romans 8:5-8) – some parents are determined enemies of God! A Christian should do God’s will rather than man’s. After all, many people have held weddings at which others stood in for their parents. You are the one to whom God spoke: thus, if you are quite **sure** of God’s **perfect** will for you, do that will and continue in it, even if it gets to the extreme point of severing family ties (Acts 5:29, Psalm 27:10, Matthew 10:34-39, Matthew 12:46-50, Genesis 12:1 with

Hebrews 11:8). God will not fail you, but will sort out the family problem in His own way and time. Remember, Genesis 2:24 says “a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife”. Go on – formalize your marriage without them!

In such extreme cases, what should be the stance of the church? The church exists on earth for the doing of the will of God. It is the duty of the church to seek and know God’s perfect will in every matter, and then support and **facilitate** that will. Adopting a rigid dogmatic position that families must first be perfectly satisfied before church can countenance a marriage, may not be right at all times. It may miss or stifle the perfect will of God in a few cases. (John 4:34, Galatians 1:10, Matthew 7:21, John 12:26).

For example, there was once a lady who was still single and childless even as she was fast approaching the menopause. She came to the Lord and sought His face diligently. After much intercession for her, she found favour in God’s eyes.

God gave her a god-fearing man and made His will for them to get married known to each of them, and to us the ministers of the church as well. God also said He would give her three children in life.

But God gave the strict warning that the couple should not appear before the lady’s family in the village to do the traditional marriage until after the birth of the last (third) child, otherwise the marriage would not stand and none of the children would be born.

The couple was duly wedded in church in a simple but not clandestine ceremony. They obeyed God’s instructions, and within 6 years of marriage had their 3 children.

By the time they eventually went for the traditional marriage, two great ‘Iroko trees’ had already fallen – God had felled the two foremost giants among those who had been fighting against anything good in the lady’s life.

The couple came back successfully from the trip, and are still happily married today, but have not had more than those three children.

The above example is, of course, particular – the exception, not the rule! It may seem awkward to some non-Africans, but most Africans would understand it. Should you have any theological or doctrinal doubts about it, remember the following facts:

- (i) The marriage was joined in church (i.e. was God - recognized)
- (ii) The revelation gave God’s own specified time when they would still go for their traditional marriage,
- (iii) The couple did do the traditional marriage when that time eventually came.

Nevertheless, know that in all those years prior to the traditional marriage, the marriage had been certainly valid before God, heaven, the church and the community who knew the couple as dedicated spouses living together with their children in a happy family.

Also, consider the following biblical examples in which God, similarly, instructed people to avoid danger:

1. *In Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, God instructed Joseph to carry young Jesus and flee from Herod and Archelaus. Does that mean Herod and Archelaus were stronger than God? No. It was to serve as example to us, in case God gives us similar instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).*
2. *In Mark 8:22-26, Jesus led the blind man out of the village before healing him; and, after healing, instructed him not to enter that village again. Obviously, the village/villagers had something to do with his blindness.*
3. *In Luke 1:24-25, Elisabeth hid herself for 5 months on getting pregnant. She also disclosed why she acted thus. She said: 'On the day wherein the Lord visited me and promised to take away my reproach, "thus" did he 'hide' me, "thus" did he show me that I would do, this is what he instructed me that I should do, this was how I foresaw myself acting'.*

So we can confidently say that 'by faith, Elisabeth, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, feared God and obeyed Him and hid herself for 5 months when she eventually became pregnant, to the saving of her pregnancy, by the which she became mother of the forerunner of Christ'. Oh, hallelujah!

Do you think there were no friends or relatives who wanted to see her during the 5 months? Do you think there were no social occasions or religious services she would have loved to attend in all those 5 months? If God gave you such instruction today, would you keep it? Wouldn't you say that greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world? Or, wouldn't you even say that you know enough of the bible not to accept that such a revelation is of God?

As stated earlier, the responsibility of getting the marriage formalized rests on the man. It is usually reported that when the woman is wealthier than the man, and is the one who sponsors the wedding or, possibly, owns the house they will move into, she does not fully respect the man in their matrimonial home.

Such disrespect is not right. It exhibits a lack of true love for the husband and for God. Apprehensions about it can cause men to either reject or delay doing God's perfect will. True Christian ladies, who know the word of God and the fact that spouses are "one flesh" and will spend all their lives together, should not have such attitude and behavior. They should think and should act differently.

As a Christian man, please don't let traditional standards or personal pride discourage you from accepting God's perfect will (Galatians 1:10, John 5:44). If you are sure your woman is God's choice for you, then know

also that her wealth or standing are God's blessings on you. Don't be apprehensive. Let your marriage be formalized, and go ahead and enjoy God's will.

♡ *Monogamy*

That polygamy was allowed and practised in the Old Testament is a well-known fact; only polyandry was outlawed. Now, does any passage in the New Testament **definitely** outlaw polygamy? The instructions in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 12, Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 5:9 refer only to church officials. How about all other Christians?

The statement that conclusively establishes monogamy was made by our Lord Jesus himself. This is:

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9, NIV).

On the surface, this verse speaks against divorce, but deeper examination shows that it also establishes monogamy. Adultery is when sex occurs between a person and another person's spouse. Jesus said that any divorce not based on God-permitted grounds is not acceptable – the marriage is **still** binding. Hence, a person who takes a woman who had been unlawfully put away commits adultery since she is still another person's wife (Matthew 5:32). More importantly, Jesus said that the husband that had sent the wife away unlawfully also commits ADULTERY when he MARRIES another wife. Note that this is not even casual illicit sex but a proper legal new marriage. If polygamy were allowed, this new marriage could not be adultery even though the previous marriage is still binding. It would simply be that the man has married an additional wife. Yes! But, by calling it ADULTERY, Jesus shows that additional marriage is now SIN whenever a previous marriage is still binding. By this, Jesus has effectively ruled out polygamy and confirmed monogamy in the New Testament.

I hope you get the point. Let me restate it: JESUS SAID THAT ANY NEW MARRIAGE WHEN ANOTHER MARRIAGE WITH SOMEBODY ELSE IS STILL BINDING, IS ADULTERY. THEREFORE, POLYGAMY IS NOW ADULTERY. This means polygamy is no longer allowed. (If polygamy has been outlawed, then, of course, concubinage has gone down with it).

Thus, our African traditionalists are wrong when they argue that there is no scripture that **decisively** prohibits polygamy for **all** Christians, but that monogamy is only a church tradition adopted in accordance with Western culture and modern socio-economic realities.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE



♡ *Divorce*

God's original and perfect will is that a marriage he approves of should be for life and what he has joined together nobody should put asunder. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:13-16, Matthew 19:3-8, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Yes, it should truly be "till death do us part". (Romans 7:2-3, Deuteronomy 22:29).

Although, legally, the terms divorce, separation, desertion and ejection have some distinctions in meaning, but before God they all basically show one and the same thing – a marriage has broken down! And that is precisely what God dislikes.

God intends for spouses to do every good thing necessary to have a lovely and sweet home, and for them to prefer to ensure that their marriages succeed. God intends for marriage and the family to help people practically learn accommodation, patience, forgiveness, love, humility, cooperation, faithfulness, appreciation, responsiveness, responsibility, management and other virtues.

A comedian at a wedding reception once declared that the short for 'marriage' is N.T.I. He then requested that anybody who knew its full meaning should please rise and tell the gathering. Nobody knew. He then disclosed that it means "Nonsense Tolerating Institute." At this, the whole gathering erupted in fits of laughter, because though it was quite humorous, yet everybody knew it is the practical truth. In the institution called marriage, no matter how much you pride yourself on being a strict disciplinarian and highly principled, you must gear up to temper that with tolerance, knowing that your spouse is human, imperfect and that some changes usually come gradually. What of when the kids start coming? Will you kill your kids who will inevitably be full of youthful idiosyncrasies? Surely, you'll not! While you train and discipline them, you'll still allow for the fact that they are youths and that with time they'll outgrow certain behaviours. The popular movie titled *The Sound of Music* vividly portrays the contrast between a highly regimented home and one where the milk of human kindness, understanding and joy flow. Remember, you have enrolled in the 'Nonsense Tolerating Institute'. God wants you to opt for the success and stability of your marriage.

However, due to mankind's "hardness of heart", God, in a **permissive** will has allowed divorce, but has limited it to only two grounds, namely: sexual immorality (Matthew 19:8-9) and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15). [NOTE: In the Old Testament, in Exodus 21:7-11 we

find that though female slaves were not to leave their masters anyhow, yet a servant-turned-wife or a servant-turned-concubine was permitted to leave a master who (due to presence of another wife) no longer gave her food, clothing and conjugal affection as befits a wife. That was evidently more than a slave departing from a master, and was a kind of divorce. Such reasons could be some among the “every cause” for divorce referred to by the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3.

However, no matter how many those “any causes” had been in the Old Testament, when the Pharisees confronted Jesus with those causes, he allowed only one cause for divorce, namely fornication – that is, marital unfaithfulness, unchastity, infidelity. (Matthew 19:9). This is why as Christ’s followers in the New Testament we recognize that the grounds on which we may (permissively) divorce and remarry have now been **limited** to the two stated in Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:15]

However, no Christian should feel that this permissive will is something to take advantage of. Jesus requires all Christians to forgive their offenders (spouses inclusive) even up to seventy times seven times (Matthew 18:21-22). Recall that Jesus forgave the penitent woman who had been caught in **adultery** (John 8:3-11). Jesus also requires that no Christian should hold fast to grievances or be unapologetic to the extent of rejecting every level of reconciliatory efforts (Matthew 18:15-17). Finally, the Lord, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 forbids a Christians that refuses reconciling with his or her Christian spouse from remarrying another while the former Christian spouse is still alive.

Does it mean that in the New Testament betrayed, ill-treated or neglected spouses are doomed to suffer for life? No. The New Testament repeatedly teaches that spouses should lead righteous lives and love each other even as Christ loves his Bride; they should give each other their due and respect; they should care and provide for their households (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

What if, in spite of all these good teachings and requirements, a spouse still persistently fails to fulfill his or her marital vows and obligations? What should the partner do? The partner should not render evil for evil (1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:21) but should continue to righteously do his or her part, and commit everything to God in prayer (Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 3:1-2). When this is done, God himself will act. Yes, he will! Hebrews 13:4 says “ *Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will **judge***”, and Romans 12:19 says “ *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘ Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’, says the Lord*”. God’s ‘judgement’ does not have to be at the end of the world. He will intervene right in this lifetime. The ‘judgement’ need not mean the death or destruction of the errant spouse. God can even ‘judge’ in a way that would make him or her finally learn the necessary lesson, become penitent and turn a new leaf. The hitherto aggrieved partner who had faithfully and hopefully looked up to God would then have a great

testimony to how God can answer prayers and turn things around. Also, if it needs a drastic ‘judgement’ like ultimately ending the marriage, God will still do that in His own way and time. Believe God!

I know that we are in a modern do-it-yourself age and that it is wrong to shift unto God what we humans should rightly do. However, divorce or avenging oneself on ones offenders are certainly NOT things that God wants humans to do! So, dear Christian, if you are facing matrimonial problems, do not contemplate divorce. Try not to nurse bitterness or resentment – I know it is difficult, but ask God for grace. Keep on faithfully obeying God and patiently committing everything to Him in prayer, and see how the Omniscient and Omnipotent will do things for you better than you could have done.

♡ Remarriage

Though some primitive cultures deprive widows of their rights and at times enslave them, worse still is the fact that some church denominations teach erroneous doctrines that have kept many Christian sisters single and even childless. This is a serious and pathetic issue. They hold fast to only the portion that says a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives and can remarry only when her previous husband is dead (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39); but they fail to realize (or purposely ignore) the fact that there are additional truths also stated in some other Bible portions.

In the first place, Deuteronomy 24:2 says that after a **biblically lawful** divorce the rejected woman can be married by another man.

What about cases of desertion or ejection? In 1 Corinthians 7:12-17, the bible teaches that when two unbelievers are married and one of them becomes a Christian, the Christian who knows God’s word is not to seek a separation or divorce from the unbelieving spouse. Rather, with the Christian’s good life, the word of God and prayer the unbelieving spouse may eventually get saved. This agrees with Peter’s advice in 1 Peter 3:1-2.

However, 1 Corinthians 7:15 then says:

“But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace” – RSV

“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace” - (NIV)

“Not bound”? Which bond is this all about? None other than the one stated in Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39! The Bible is saying that if an unbelieving partner leaves, deserts, divorces or separates from the Christian, the Christian is in that case not bound by that law, with the ex-spouse STILL ALIVE.

Rejection by an unbelieving partner CANNOT leave a child of God still bound to that LIVING unbeliever in a life of loneliness and sorrow. The Christian can REMARRY, but should make sure this time round she (or he) marries “only in the Lord”.

Notice that in 1Corinthians chapter 7 Paul was addressing Corinthian **believers**. In verse 11, God was banning remarriage for a BELIEVER who refuses reconciliation! But verse 15 applies when it involves the action of an unbelieving partner, in which case the ban of verse 11 is lifted for the believer and he or she is “not bound”. The Bible itself does not make the remarriage ban in verse 11 a blanket one, but recognizes the existence of different cases like that of verse 15, in which case some concession is made and a different instruction is given.

Let us now examine the issue of going back to make it up with an ex-spouse and remarrying. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 makes it clear that if the ex-wife married any other person any time after the breakup, then that closes the door against the ex-spouses remarrying each other. But if she had not, the ex-husband can remarry her only when he himself is biblically not still tied to some other wife, since Christianity demands monogamy. However, if no other marriage had been contracted in the intervening period, 1Corinthians 7:10-11 requires that Christian ex-spouses go **reconcile** and resume their marriage.

Consider a case in which someone had once been genuinely married while still an unbeliever, then the marriage broke up **unlawfully**, and both ex-spouses had since then remained unmarried. The person is now born-again and wishes to marry. The proper thing is to first make genuine and concerted efforts to reconcile with, and resume marriage with the unmarried ex-spouse, *where possible*. We say “where possible” because many factors would now come into play, like:

- i. Is the ex-spouse now reachable?
- ii. Does the ex-spouse still want to marry him or her?
- iii. And, very importantly, the born again Christian must now marry only ‘in the Lord’ and not marry an unbeliever. Will the ex-spouse accept the Christian’s new faith and lifestyle? Is the ex-spouse ready to repent and give his or her life to Christ?

If the unmarried ex-spouse had patiently longed for the reunion, gladly welcomes it, and lovingly follows the Lord Jesus, then, excellent! They have to resume their marriage. However, if after every genuine and concerted effort, things still cannot work out well, does the born-gain Christian have to remain single? No! He or she should ask God for another person whom to marry. The born-again Christian has tried his or her best in doing his or her part – the problem is with the ex-spouse.

1 Corinthians 7:15 talks about an unbelieving partner. What of when the Christian’s partner is either a **fake** ‘believer’ or a genuine believer who later **falls** or **backslides** to the extent of rejecting God’s will about the lifelong permanence of marriage and does the unchristian thing of deserting or ejecting the Christian? What is the fate of the Christian in such

case? I am strongly of the view that 1 Corinthians 7:15 **still applies** in such cases. I give the following reason:

In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus gave the Christian steps for conflict resolution. Some misunderstanding will never fail to arise between human beings, but good Christians should always get over them.

Jesus said that any so-called ‘believer’ who consistently refuses resolution of differences to the extent of not accepting the reconciliation efforts and recommendations of the church should be treated as a pagan, heathen and publican (verse 17).

By his or her fruit, the fellow has made known what he or she truly is. He or she is among the “unbelieving”, and Jesus said he or she should be treated as one. 1 Corinthians 7:15 applies to him or her.

The church would excommunicate such an ungodly and recalcitrant fellow, and he or she would thus be severed from the Christian fold. And Jesus confirmed that “whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18). Hence, the Christian who had not desired divorce but reconciliation is LOOSED from lifelong bond to such a departed “unbeliever”, and according to 1 Corinthians 7:15 is not bound and is FREE to remarry!

However, the ‘believer’ who had known the truth but still deserted or ejected the spouse and refuses all reconciliation is guilty and is not permitted to contract any other marriage (1 Corinthians 7:11).

The Christian who had not desired divorce but reconciliation should then pray to God and He will give him or her another person whom to marry. They should not let any denominational dogma subject them to lifelong deprivation. It is very rare for God to require someone to serve him as a celibate. And very few people can receive the grace to truly serve him as voluntary celibates without frequently getting entangled in lust, porn, petting, masturbation, envy, hardness, self-pity, depression, etc. “It is better to marry than to burn”. (Read Genesis 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, 1 Corinthians 7:2, 7, 9; Matthew 19:10-12).

Church denominations should please be careful not to make unbiblical marital regulations and demands which can make their members suffer unnecessary deprivation, humiliation, sorrow, childlessness and other woes.

♡ *The Unequal Yoke*

It is said that “*what God has joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Mark 10:9). The question then comes: “what about what God did **not** join?” Many people answer that, obviously, it should not stand. What is your answer? Another question is: Is it everything we see around that has been joined by God? Many people answer: “Obviously not”. What is your answer?

The bible talks about the unequal yoke in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 thus: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*”, and goes on

to explain that there can't be any communion or concord between those who are of Christ and those who are of the Devil. In verse 17, God gives the plain command: "*Wherefore come out from the midst of them and be separated*" -- DARBY.

There have been cases in which special demonic agents (especially marine ones) were sent on the specific mission of marrying someone whom God intended to use mightily in this world. The aim of such marriage is always to thwart all that mighty ministry and to eventually kill the person.

The deliverance of the children of God from such yokes of bondage usually comes after a long time of bitter suffering, and after they've realized their terrible error or disobedience. The deliverance always involves great spiritual battle (with physical dimensions and manifestations) which would result in the death of the demonic agent if he/she is too stubborn to escape in time.

Many such delivered children of God are now successfully serving God and are happily remarried.

This may seem strange to some readers, but those who have read the books of the likes of Ike Nathan Uzorma, etc, would not find it hard to believe the existence of such cases.

A certain evil father – an advanced marine wizard – once effected and concluded the spiritual marriage of his Christian daughter to one of his principal agents in the marine kingdom. By manipulation, they were made to meet each other in the physical world, and it was love at first sight. The emotional bonding and commitment was so strong that even when, sometime later, the young Christian lady heard the audible voice of God telling her that the young man was a son of Satan and that she should withdraw totally from him, she couldn't obey that clear voice of God but went ahead and married him, naively promising God that she would make him repent and be converted.

The matrimonial home turned out a house-of-horror for her. After some years of unsuccessful efforts to prevent her from attending church, the husband decided it was time to finish her off. She was then living a life of constantly fasting and pleading to God to forgive her disobedience and help her.

God was merciful and also didn't like the Devil to have the victory in thwarting God's great plans in her life. God instructed a team of four gospel ministers in another town entirely to fast for 3 days and intercede for her. They obeyed, and during the fast God showed them many things about her and gave detailed instructions for her to follow so as to escape the bondage and imminent death.

She carefully observed those instructions, and God performed great miracles. God made the State Government to make a requirement, just then, on all civil servants, which necessitated her travelling out.

The son of Satan was amazed by such an unexpected official development; he sensed something and quickly devised a counter-strategy. He rushed to the Police and made serious false allegations against her and submitted her recent photographs to them.

By the time the lady travelled out she was already a wanted woman. She knew nothing about this and travelled openly and without any form of disguise. The number of police checkpoints along the way on that day was more than usual. She was shocked to see the police at every of those checkpoints holding her recent photographs and scrutinizing every passenger's face in their search for the 'wanted woman'. Miraculously, none of them could recognize her and arrest her till she finally arrived safely at her destination. Hallelujah! Talk about God 'blinding' people as he had done for Elisha in 2 Kings 6:13, 18-20!

The lady is now a gospel minister and happily remarried. She gave this testimony at a Christian convention when narrating the story of her life and call to the ministry. Some people may question the compliance of those events with biblical teachings, but he who hath ears let him hear. And if ye will receive it, her testimony is true and represents a great deliverance wrought by the sovereign God, whose mercy usually triumphs over the wiles of the Devil.

The unequal yoke has ruined many Christians and would-be vessels of glory. Beware!

♡ *Death Terminates Marital Bond*

The Bible says that when God has joined two people together, the bond of marriage should last till the death of a spouse, whereupon the surviving spouse would be free from the bond (Roman 7:2-3, 1 Corinthians 7:39) and can remarry. The Bible also advises that widows below age 60 should not be made, or allowed, to stay celibate but should remarry, bear children and keep their homes, because their youthful passions are still very strong (1 Timothy 5:9-14). God is not a wicked and stifling God. These biblical truths are what should determine a Christian's course of action, not some primitive enslaving culture.

It is, therefore, appalling to see in our African societies those who claim to be Christians and yet, on the death of a husband, still try to practise a culture of tying down the widow in the late husband's family, after having deprived her of almost all her inheritance rights.

A young, beautiful and highly-educated Christian lady of just 29 years once reported the ordeal she suffered at the hands of her late husband's people. After having subjected her to various inhuman funeral rites, they finally tried to **coerce** her into remaining as a widow in their family compound in their remote idol-worshipping village.

She was shown an array of other widows who had been "convinced" to remain there. These included even teenage girls, held down to a bleak life, deprived of their freedom and future.

Instead of sympathizing with the bereaved lady, they saw it best to take advantage of that her moment of grief and weakness and "inherit" her.

It took all the firmness of the lady, the help of Christian brethren and the power of God for her to escape all their selfish attempts.

In the book of Ruth, we see how the good-hearted and well-meaning Naomi, after the death of her sons, advised her young daughters-in-law to go and get remarried. Orpah left. Naomi also later gave Ruth all the advice that helped her to get remarried to the rich man Boaz. This good example is worthy of emulation.

Dear Christian, the bible says that the death of a spouse terminates the marital bond. After that, the surviving spouse is FREE. Never succumb to any culture, teaching, suggestion or demand to the contrary.

Even if you're an OLD widow or widower, but you're lucky to find a spouse and you wish to remarry, you are free to do so irrespective of what culture or society may say about it. In fact, in Western countries some couples have been getting married at **advanced** ages, not for procreation of course, but for the love, warmth, understanding, companionship and security they find in each other

Stand on the biblical truths that liberate, because knowledge is useful only when it is applied where necessary. Permit me to illustrate this with a true-life experience.

There is a lady whose late husband had been a powerful wizard. In his lifetime, he had spiritually and physically reduced the wife to a virtual slave who dreaded him very much. After his demise, the demon that had been in him usually came spiritually in his image to continue tormenting the lady, who was somehow helpless since the old dread and ideas were still in her mind

The demon usually took amorous advantage of her and, in fact, usually attempted cutting off her life by exercising authority over her as her "husband" and commanding her as his "wife" to come go with him, whereupon she would start behaving strangely and conversing with unseen spirits and long-departed family members.

She was brought to church, and when the demon next attempted, the church used the Word of God in Romans 7:2-3 and 1Corinthians 7:39 to authoritatively send the demon away.

She was taught the truth and how to stand by faith on those truths and overcome the Devil.

The demon was a stubborn one, and after some weeks returned to harass the lady at her home at night. She used those words of God to firmly resist the demon and, to her amazement, it departed. This personal victory greatly bolstered her faith.

After two more defeats in later attempts, the demon realized he had lost his influence over her completely, and finally left.

Now, the lady is free and healthy and active in church. She has known the truth and the truth has made her free.

CONCLUSION



“*M*arriage is honourable”, says Hebrews 13:4.

It is not something to be taken lightly and it should not be contracted or dissolved without a great deal of thought and Holy Spirit’s guidance.

For the Christian, those thoughts must align with the word of God; and, indeed, lack of anchorage in biblical truth leaves one liable to being tossed about by every wind of familial, cultural or denominational expectations.

Before God, engagements are binding and should never be broken except on the lawful grounds of adultery. God has commanded that marriages be properly formalized in the applicable way.

Upon getting married, couples are not to forget or desert their native family and relatives, but should never allow them to unduly interfere with their marital home/affairs.

A couple should understand the implications of launching a new independent entity – a home of their own. The husband’s God-given position as head of the family goes with many responsibilities and powers, which he should fulfill and exercise lovingly and in the fear of God. The wife, who is not a ‘glorified servant’ but his life counterpart, has her responsibilities and God-given rights too. They should together build their home.

God’s perfect will for marriage is lifelong permanence, and he hates all forms of breakdown in marriage. He has, though, permitted divorce and remarriage in some circumstances.

God instituted marriage and he rarely demands celibacy. Indeed, institutionally demanded celibacy is listed among the doctrines of devils in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. A Christian should never let any tradition or denomination subject him or her to it.

*I*t is my sincere hope that God has used this piece to further enrich your already-rich bank of knowledge about marriage. Act on the truths which you have learnt. The truth liberates. Repent, and walk with the Lord. In conflict situations, choose to do the perfect will of God which you are **sure** of, and God will not fail you, for He has promised: “I will not forsake thee, I will never leave thee, I am thy Redeemer, I will care for thee” (Deuteronomy 31:8, Isaiah 41:10).

GOD BLESS YOU.

Dear friend, if this book has been a blessing to you, then own a copy for reference; and, please, do the good work of helping your friends and others get copies of this liberating truth. May God bless you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, an erstwhile university lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics has been a full-time gospel minister for the past two and a half decades and is now a bishop in Mount Olive Church of Christ, Nigeria – a full-gospel evangelical and deliverance ministry. He is married to Maddie, a co-minister, and they are blessed with five children.

NOTE TO THE PUBLISHERS

The cover design and illustration is by the author. The background is olive green. The box and the words “Some Biblical Truths About” are bright yellow. The couple and the word “MARRIAGE” are white, lined with black. The author’s name is in black. The cover should be laminated or glossy and some or all of the letters and figures could be embossed.

The book itself could be about 20cm by 14cm and should not be too voluminous; and the prints should not be too small or too compacted, so as not to discourage the average reader. The binding should NOT be by simply stapling. These are my amateur suggestions.

However, I request that you employ your professional expertise and experience to make the book attractive and easy to read.

Thank you.

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