

International Journal of Family Life and Societal Development  
(IJOFALSOD)

Vol. 2, No. 1, June, 2023.

©

Institute of Family Life and Societal Development

ISSN: 2971-5164

Published by  
Institute of Family Life and Societal Development  
Academic Arm of the Centre for Blissful Home Initiative

Printed by  
Johnstar Educational Services  
Akure, Ondo State  
+234-8035608098, +234-8067746123, +234-8159992030.

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## **Editorial**

One of the pressing questions that reverberates often in African Christianity is: What is an (African) Christian family? Family is very important to the traditional Africans. Raising a family is not just a social and cultural demand that has to be meant, but also a conditional for eschatological redemption or salvation. For the African Christian, the place of family cannot also be over-emphasised. Thus, prayers for the family in all its ramifications occupy the central stage in personal and intercession sessions. Although African Christians have for a long time contended with the notions of the Christian family in general, there is a progressive acceptance of its monogynous union based on heterosexuality. However, Western values and globalisation forces have continued to shape Christian family discourses and practices. Sex and sexuality issues have been escalated and mediated so much so that Christian 'theology' of family, sexuality, and sex has to contend with the throes of globalisation.

This volume, which is a product of the 2023 conference on the theme: Christian Family and Sexuality in Contemporary Society, critically reflects the tensions, challenges, and theological prospects of a Christian family. In the lead article, Professor Knoetze departs from the general conception of the Christian family based on Christ's salvation. Although he points out that family is a contested issue in Africa, he argues that a radical conception of the Christian family should centre around relationality, forging a missional relationship with the Trinitarian God. This is in contrast with the soteriological conception of family that has blurred the missional prospects that understanding family can birth for a long time.

Adu-Gyamfi's article also radically takes on the traditional conception of sex as a purely private issue, and attempts to strike a balance between it and the sexual revolution that theology of sexuality has to contend with. Coming from a heteronormative perspective, Adu-Gyamfi strongly maintains conservative theological stand on sexuality. He argues that the biblical

understanding of sexuality cannot be traded with the offering of the over-sexualised world.

On her own, Ayo-Oladayo explores the significance and nexus between language education and family development. She points out that effective communication in the family is a *sine qua non* for cohesion, unity, and progress. In addition to fostering cultural understanding, supporting cognitive growth, and fostering stronger family ties, it also improves communication abilities. Oladapo and Adererele examine the positive impacts of social change, particularly technological advancement, on the family. They opine that despite the advantages derived from modern communications devices, Christian theological understanding of the family should be countenanced and appropriated by Christian families.

Odesola and Odesola reflect on the significance of sex education in the church. Although sex education has not been a major interest in missional and catechetical teaching, they suggest that contemporary challenges make it imperative for the church to be interested in sex education. Otun's article introduces a philosophical dimension to sexuality discourse. Otun views the relegation of reason in choice- and decision-making processes as unacceptable and recommends a balanced deployment of both reason and faith in sexuality matters. Gombi re-examines the accounts of Genesis and contemporary sexual expressions. In the Genesis creation stories, an explanation of the nature of sexuality takes a central, climactic positioning and is given as a fundamental fact of creation. The excessive amount of material given to sexuality highlights its relevance in the Hebrew Bible within the cosmic context of the creation narratives. The foundation for the rest of the biblical narrative and discourse on human sexuality is provided by the profound depiction of God's original plan for human sexuality at the beginning of the canon, which also captures the core ideas of sexuality. Salifu enumerates the negative effects of street hawking, such as rape, unplanned pregnancies, and violence. He recommends that the state and social institutions should intervene to stem the corrosive tide of street hawking in Nigeria.

Biar explores the disagreement between 'pre-modernism' and postmodernism. He argues that the different positions these schools of thought hold have created serious tension in how to understand human sexuality. The recognition of feeling over reason and the relativistic contours that encircle the arguments of postmodernism, modernism, and premodernism all have impact on Christian notion of sexuality. He, however, maintains that the Bible still reserves the best model of sexual appreciation in contemporary society. For Kosoluware, the negative influences of postmodernism should be frontally addressed by contemporary African Christians. It is essential that the Church in Africa rise to the challenge through teaching, counseling and intentional preaching of the gospel. Atteh examines Christian moral victory, and points out the tensions that have characterised its different interpretations. He opines that the best approach to the theological issue is to insist that the victory believers have over the flesh nature is both positional and progressive, encompassing both the divine and the human responsibilities. Asaolu tackles the increasing cases of marital infidelity in society. Articulating the causes and effects of marital infidelity, Asaolu recommends that couples act in such a way that their actions could conform with Kantian categorical imperative. Finally, Ajao makes a case for sex education as a part of socialisation in the family. He notes that it is no longer possible to hold the view that sex talk is a taboo. Therefore, there should be a conscious approach to addressing sexuality issues.

This volume is a coterie of discourses on sex, sexuality and family. The burning issues raised from multidisciplinary perspectives enrich the volume and provide a critical resource for further engagement. However, the ideas are solely the responsibility of the authors rather than the editorial board of the journal.

**Benson Ohihon Igbion**  
Editor-in-Chief

## **CHRISTIAN FAMILY AND THEOLOGY OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR**

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### **Abstract:**

Sexual behaviour is a creation of God. It is, therefore reasonable to be sexually active and engage in sexual activity. However, contemporary society has deviated from God's intention for human sexual activity. The Christian family faces the challenge of following not the way of society but the way of God. The Bible, which is the Christian's authority for their beliefs and practices, is to inform the Christian how to behave sexually in contemporary society of moral degradation. The article shows that the Christian must enjoy sex following God's word but must hate the evil ways of sexual behaviour that society has accepted and practiced. Christian parents and children have roles to play in maintaining good sexual behaviour among the evil beliefs and practices of contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Christian family, theology sexuality, sexual behaviour

### **Introduction**

Discussions on sexuality has not been common in Christian homes, especially in Africa. Sexual issues appear to be private and therefore scarcely would you hear discussions on it publicly. Young people, for example, are not expected to talk about sex, more especially in Christian homes. The mention of sex, in many Christian cycles in Africa, is a taboo. However, sex and sexuality are not evil things to talk about because sex is God-made. God created sex for humanity and so it is good. However, when man sinned good things that God created, which includes sex was distorted. As a result, there has been sexual attitudes and activities that are against God's intention for sex and sexual behaviour among people. Clearly, rapid social change has brought about a degree of acceptance of unhealthy sexual behaviour

in society, which has extended to the church and so among Christian families. Hence, the main theme of this conference, 'Christian Family and Sexuality in Contemporary Society'.

The focus of this article is 'Christian family and theology of sexual behaviour'. The article attempts to inform Christian families how to behave sexually in accordance with God's plan for humankind. To achieve this, the article is divided into five sections. First, it discusses the Christian family. It then looks at sexual behaviour in contemporary society. The third section focuses on the biblical teachings on sexual behaviour. Section four sketches theology of sexual behaviour. Finally, attention is drawn to the Christian family and theology of sexual behaviour with emphasis on what Christian family members should know and to do about sexual behaviour.

### **The Christian Family**

The creation story clearly shows that God established families from the very beginning. Stephens-Hodge (1960:214) states that historically, the family is the first social group to merge among humankind and contains in its primitive form the germs of both state and church. It is both a good in itself and a means for promoting further good. For Lee (1993:135), 'God established the home as a unit of society.' He adds that 'centuries before there was a state, school, or church, there were homes instituted by God as places where men and women should live together in love and in happiness, where children should be born and reared'.

The Bible teaches how to have a loving, happy family. Home is where we begin every morning and end every night, so, it is the primary place where a person learns how to make sense of things. So, the family has a twofold purpose: physical and moral. Physical in the sense that the family gives birth to children. The moral purpose is that the family is the place for the training of individuals to sink their individuality into a higher unity. Thus, education is mainly the

family's concern, not the school or the state. It is the training ground for both spiritual and moral education. All true family life stems from God (Eph. 3:15). In sum, family is at the centre of God's plan for the happiness and progress of his children. We use 'family' to mean a community of a father, mother and children/dependents.

The term 'Christian' is not used to mean one who goes to church or is a member of a congregation. Neither do we use it for those with names of biblical persons. We use the term to mean someone who has repented of their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Such a person has one main purpose, 'to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom 8:29). To achieve this, one must live in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. The Bible becomes the basis of one's beliefs and practices. And so, by 'Christian family', we mean a family where the Bible informs the beliefs and practices of its members. In this Christian family, children are to obey their parents in the Lord, while parents are not to provoke their children but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:1-4).

About the wonder of the Christian home, Lee (1993:136-137) asserts that it 'is an ante-room to heaven where husband and wife "submit themselves one to another in fear of God," where parents rear their children in God's nurture and admonition, where children obey their parents, where God's Word has a place, where the Sabbath rolls in tender blessing over the threshold – a field where love grows its orchard of most delicious fruits.' He further describes the Christian home as 'a church within a church, a republic within a republic, a world within a world, a kingdom within a kingdom'. For him, 'if things go right there, they go right everywhere'. Lee, describing the importance of the home, says that 'no movement will move unless it moves there'; 'no reform will work unless it originates there'; 'no law stands unless it is favoured there' 'no religion prospers unless it is usable there'; 'a real democracy ... is a cluster of homes, not individuals'. He posits that 'the home is the heart of civilisation'



and, among others, states that 'if there are not enough moral principles to make the family adhere, there will not be enough political principles to make the state adhere'. Lee concludes his description of the wonder of the home that 'the same storm that upsets the ship in which the family sails will sink the frigate of the Constitution' and that 'the door of the home is the best fortress.

Lee (1993:137-138) laments about the neglect of the home as God's agency for contemporary society. For him, 'with the decay of our home life will come the decay of civilisation' and opines that 'when our homes become the generators of spiritual influences, we shall witness an infusion of new power in the life of the churches'. Lee (1993:139-146) indicates that the home functions for God and civilization when (1) there is parental authority, (2) we must have Christian experience and influence, (3) there must be tongue rule in the home, (4) love must be professed and possessed, (5) we need breeding and rearing of persons, and (6) Christ must be given a large place in the home. It is this Christian family that has come face to face with the deviant sexual behaviours of society. And it is this Christian family, that should behave sexually in accordance with God's word in the midst of social pollution.

### **Sexual Behaviour in Contemporary Society**

The sexual revolution that began in the 1960s in Britain sought to replace the traditional emphasis on sexual self-restraint with an emphasis on sexual freedom where people are free to make love with whomever they wished without the strictures of marriage – a monogamous, public, legally binding commitment (Lickona 1998:306). By the 1970s the population of both the USA and much of Western Europe approached the zero goal and so many people took a relaxed attitude toward pre- and extramarital sex since sex could now be 'safe'. As a result, most teenagers experienced sexual intercourse and so teenager pregnancy became a growing problem. Many adults accepted the idea that any form of sexual behaviour between

consenting adults was permissible. This led to public acknowledgement of the Gay Rights movement, with homosexuals and lesbians asserting their lifestyle. These changing attitudes towards sexual relations were paralleled by a movement that argued that it is a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy (Schnucker 1991:750).

Although the sexual revolution promised greater happiness, decades later, it is painfully clear that our society suffers from a plague of problems stemming from the abandonment of traditional norms of sexual morality (Lickona 1998:306). Schnucker (1991:750) explains that 'the recognition of the seriousness of Herpes and the discovery of AIDS brought home some of the unfortunate consequences of the sexual revolution'. He adds that AIDS caused many to reevaluate their ethical concepts, particularly because the disease spread into the heterosexual population. Like Lickona, Schnucker (1991:750) testifies that there was 'an urgency in the call for a return to the traditional religious values and ethics which once governed sex and marriage'.

Collins (1980:248) indicates that 'sexuality, like anything else created, has fallen into trouble. We are more vulnerable than ever, living in a society that crowds sexual innuendoes into every available space, whether billboards or office conversations'. He adds that 'the whole society is reeling' and that 'we are burdened by ruined families, staggered by millions of abortions, and terrified by a sexual epidemic'. Collins stresses that 'sex no longer is something that may be right or wrong; it is little more than a way for two people to be together' to the extent that evangelical Christians are not forcefully and clearly speaking about the issues.

Contemporary society has become so preoccupied with sex that it has become the major issue on television shows, in magazines, advertising, music, literature, theatre, movies, arts and popular

conversation (Irving, 2008, 8). It has taken centre stage in business, education, politics and even the church. Let us look at the trend of sexual behaviour in contemporary society. First, marriage is no longer the place for sexual intercourse. Cohabitation has, in a way, replaced marriage. A man and a woman live together and have emotional/sexual relationship without being married. Hence, the common practice of premarital sexual behaviour. Second, there are different types of sexual activity. (1) acts that involve one person, autoeroticism, which includes sexual fantasy or masturbation, self-stimulation of one's genitals to the point of orgasm. This sexual behaviour can be practiced through phone – where either a man talking to a man or a woman, or a woman and a woman (phone sex); (2) acts that involve two or more people, which includes vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex or mutual masturbation; (3) penetrative sex between two people usually referred to as sexual intercourse; (4) acts that involve more than two participants (group sex); (5) autoerotic acts including the use of dildos, vibrators, butt plugs, and other sex toys. Explaining why women prefer vibrators over men, a young lady reveals that 'Men are NOT “Eating” us well, that's why we are using vibrators.' (Smith & Wolfinger, 2023, 3) Thus, the pleasure of sex can be very addictive; many young women are becoming addicted and so have developed an insatiable desire for continuous sexual satisfaction beyond what one man can give at a given session; hence they want multiple sessions including the use of vibrators. This has led to the men taking aphrodisiac drugs to satisfy these women. Such women are sure to fail in their marriages.

Third, sex is practised in unnatural ways. One of such is bestiality - a man or woman having sex with an animal. A woman on social media is seen with a black dog, which she says can satisfy her sexually better than her boyfriend. She said the dog could sleep with her for a continuous thirty minutes by which she could have four orgasms. Another unnatural sexual behaviour is homosexuality, sexual intercourse between same-sex persons.

Collins (1980:252-254) mentions severe factors that contribute to these sexual behaviours. First, environmental stimulation, which includes the social atmosphere, sexual convenience, liberal values, and inappropriate education. Second, internal pressure through curiosity, uncontrolled fantasy, the search for identity and self-esteem, the search for intimacy and closeness, distorted thinking, and satanic influence.

What should be the attitude of Christian families towards these sexual behaviours? What does the Bible say about sexual behaviour? Are contemporary sexual behaviours good for Christian families?

### **The Bible and Sexual Behaviour**

The Bible is the basis of Christian theology; it informs the Christian's beliefs and practices. And so, the Bible should be the basis of Christians' theology of sexual behaviour.

### **Creation of Man – Male and Female**

The Bible says, 'God created man [generic] in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27). According to Bromiley (1980:1), the phrase 'male and female he created them' is not a direct reference to marriage. Thus, God did not create man husband and wife. Rather, he created the sexual distinction in unity (man as male and female), which forms the larger background of marriage. In other words, there is distinction of 'mankind' as 'male' and 'female'. So, God created mankind into two sexes. The mention of male and female prepares for the blessing to follow in 1:28: 'God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply"'. It is important to note that in Genesis 2, which describes into detail the process summarized in Gen 1:27, God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him' (Gen 2:18). The Hebrew has it, 'The being of man by himself is not good'. 'It is not good' implies that, within the context of creation, in which God instructs mankind to be fruitful and multiply, the man alone cannot comply. Being alone prevents man from fulfilling the

design of creation and, therefore, is not good. The Hebrew word *'ezer* does not suggest the traditional 'helper', which suggests a subordinate role. Rather, the word seems to express the idea of an 'indispensable companion'. The woman would supply what the man lacked in the creation design. Hebrew expressions translated 'Fit for him' is *knegdo*, which literally means 'according to the opposite of him', something like 'corresponding to'. Thus, the man's form and nature are matched by the woman's as she reflects him and compliments him. So, the phrase means that the woman has everything that God had invested in the man. In 2:24, the word 'therefore' links the making of the woman from a part of the man with the phrase 'one flesh', which, in part, refers to the sexual union between a man and a woman in marriage.

### **Old Testament and Sexuality**

In Israel's culture, a woman was a sexual partner (Packer, et al 1980:426-27). It was against the Law for an unmarried woman to have sexual relations. She was to remain a virgin until after the marriage ceremony. If anyone could prove that she was not a virgin when she married, she was brought to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city stoned her to death (Deut 22:20-21).

Sex was a very important part of married life. God had ordained the sexual relationship to be enjoyed in the proper place and between the right people – marriage partners. The Jews felt so strongly about this that a newly married man was freed from his military or business duties for a whole year so that he could 'bring joy to the wife he has married' (Deut 24:5 NET). The only restriction was that the husband and wife were not supposed to have sexual relations during her menstrual period (Lev 18:19).

Sex was to be enjoyed by the wife as well as the husband. In the Song of Solomon, the woman is portrayed as very aggressive, kissing her husband and leading him into the bed chamber. She expresses her love for him over and over, and she urges him to enjoy their physical relationship (1:2; 2:3-6, 8-10; 8:1-4).

## **The New Testament and Sexual Behaviour**

Jesus was concerned about sexuality. In Matt 19:4-6, he cites Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as the normative pattern that God expects all marriages to follow. He asserts that marriage is about a relationship between the two different sexes, 'male and female'. He also reaffirmed Exod 20:14 in Matt 19:18. As a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul strongly refers to the same biblical texts in his teaching on sexuality and sexual behaviour. Although Paul did not address the subject of human sexuality in a systematic manner, he said a lot about it in response to problems in the churches.

### ***Refrain from Illicit Sexual Behaviour***

His discourse in 1 Thess 4:1-8 alludes that sexual behaviour was his basic teaching to a community of new converts. This is so because various forms of sexual license were common in the Greco-Roman world; thus, it 'reflects the laxer sexual mores of Hellenistic society' (Wright 1993:871). Sexual immorality was characteristic of the pagan world. For instance, there was no commandment or law forbidding adultery among pagans as depicted in an assertion by Aulus Gellius, a Roman philosopher and grammarian, who lived a century after Paul, 'If you catch your wife in adultery, you may, without punishment, kill her without a trial; but if you commit adultery or indecency, she must not even lay a finger on you, nor does the law allow it' (cited in Freed 2005:84). Freed (2005:84) further quotes Demosthenes, who lived in mid-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 'Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for the sake of daily intercourse, wives to bear us legitimate children and to be our faithful housekeepers'.

Therefore, it was necessary for Paul to remind the believers at Thessalonica that to live in holiness means to refrain from illicit sexual relationships (1 Thess 4:3). The word translated as 'illicit sexual relationships' is *porneia* and means the practice of having sex with a *porne*, 'a female prostitute', or with a *pornos*, 'a male prostitute'.

*Porneia* is used to denote any kind of illegitimate – extramarital and unnatural – sexual intercourse or relationship; thus, sexual immorality. In 4:3, it may be taken as 'fornication' because the men Paul addresses are apparently unmarried; each man was to find a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust as the pagans who do not God do (4:4-5). As Freed (2005:83) shows, Paul's encouragement to the men to get their own wives was to stress that converts must not engage in the sexual immorality characteristic of the pagan world. He exhorts the Christians in Thessalonica not to yield to sexual passions like the pagans but control their bodies or kept to their own wives (1 Thess 4:4). Paul makes it clear that converts to Christianity should refrain from illicit sexual behaviour because it is wrong, it violates God's commandments and in discord with the new life under the Spirit.

### ***Marriage and Sex***

There seems to be a disagreement in both the Corinthian and Ephesian churches about the role of sex. And so, in his letter to the Corinthian church and to Timothy at Ephesus he addresses the issue of sexual behaviour (Field 1988:1931-32). In the case of Corinth, Freed (2005) puts it simply, 'morality comes to an immoral city'. Sexual vice was common in these cities. One group of people felt that all of life was to be enjoyed, and so any sexual behaviour, including adultery, prostitution, and homosexual acts, was acceptable. For these Christians, 'everything is permissible for me' (1 Cor 6:12). In chapter 6 Paul responds to this antinomian 'permissiveness'. He is concerned that the Christian congregations be kept free of such corruptions: 'among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality (*porneia*)... because these are improper for God's holy people' (Eph 5:3). In 1 Cor 5:1-2, Paul is angry that the Corinthian church is tolerating, rather than disciplining a member indulging in incest with his father's wife, a sexual behaviour not even countenanced among non-Christians.

In reaction to this libertinism, another group was formed that thought sex was somehow evil and that one should not have any physical relations at all, not even with one's spouse. Thus, ascetic attitude tried to take control in the believers' lives - marriage was being decried (1 Tim 4:3), and married couples were abandoning intercourse in the belief that this would help them to become more spiritually mature (cf. 1 Cor 7:5). Some men even thought that it was 'good for a man not to marry' (1 Cor 7:1). It is within this background that Paul taught about sexuality among Christians.

Addressing the sexual behaviour of the first group, Paul reminds the believers that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that sexual intercourse is exercised between a man and a woman in marriage. So, he taught that adultery and homosexuality are sins and should be avoided (1 Cor 6:9-11); he taught against prostitution (1 Cor 6:15-18) and incest (1 Cor 5:1-2). On the sexual behaviour of the second group, he refers to the message of Genesis and encourages believers to receive sex as God's gift thankfully (1 Tim 4:3-5). He instructs that husband and wife are mutually obliged to express their love for one another in sexual intercourse (1 Cor 7:3, 4). He indicates that physical love-making in marriage is as much part of what it means to 'honour God with your body' as refusing to go to bed with a prostitute (cf. 1 Cor 6:15, 20). In other words, Paul speaks positively about sexual relations (Field 1988:1931).

Paul teaches that marriage is needed and right because *porneia* as an outlet for sexuality is intolerable (1 Cor 7:2). This implies that the satisfying of sexual desire is not wrong, and marriage is its appointed setting. Sex is one of the mutual obligations of husband to wife and wife to husband (1 Cor 7:3), because within marriage, neither partner retains sole ownership of his or her own body (1 Cor 7:4).

From the discussion so far, the issue is no longer 'is sex within marriage ever good?' but 'when, if ever, is abstinence from sex within marriage right?' Paul gives three criteria (1) mutual consent, (2) for a



limited time only, and (3) for religious purposes (1 Cor 7:5). Note that abstinence is a concession. It is assumed that by divine appointment, marriage and sexual relations go together, as do singleness and abstinence from sex (Wright 1993:873).

In sum, the Bible takes a positive view of human sexuality. The Genesis account of creation indicates that God himself made people sexual beings. Being male or female is part of being created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28). Therefore, sexuality is a precious aspect of what a person *is*, not merely a description of what he or she *does* (Field 1988:1931-32).

### **Biblical Expectation of Sexual Pleasure**

In line with the Bible's positive view of sexuality, the OT sees nothing embarrassing in bodily differences between the sexes (Gen 2:25), and nothing shameful in physical expressions of love-making (Prov 5:18, 19; Eccl 9:9). A consistent expectation throughout Scripture is that the sexual experience is for the pleasure of the relationship. The Bible endorses the concept of sexual pleasure and assumes a healthy passion. Unlike animals, who mate according to their hormonal cycles, humans make love for pleasure. Indeed, Scripture instructs believers always to be available to their spouses (1 Cor 7:3-5), not just for making babies at the time of the month when that is possible. Therefore, we see sexual pleasure as superseding procreation.

The Song of Songs contains some of the most beautiful and erotic poetry ever written. Its powerful language should not be so spiritualized that the physical passion it describes is stripped of its delight and candour. The book affirms two points. First, it 'is the Bible's ultimate refutation of any Platonic or gnostic depreciation of the material body in general or sexuality in particular; otherwise put, there is no sin inherent in sex.' Second, 'it affirms (yea, celebrates) sexual expression as an expression of love and joy in its own right and not merely as an instrumental mean to the end of procreation' (Heider 2008:455).

It is in the Bible for our benefit. Some important passages are 3:1; 5:10-16; 7:1-11. These passages obviously do not encourage us to hold back our passionate feelings; yet many people come to the sexual experience with the feelings: 'I cannot really let go'. We need to know that it is God's intention for us to enjoy the sexual experience and to let our feelings flow freely.

### **The Bible and Deviant Sexual Behaviour**

However, the Bible teaches against deviant sexual behaviour. Discussing sexuality and sexual ethics in the Pentateuch, Sprinkle (2003:745-751) draws attention to, among others, adultery, seduction and rape, incest, homosexual acts, bestiality, prostitution or harlotry, and intercourse with a menstruant. He concludes that 'the Pentateuch sees sexuality as a good thing when lawfully expressed but destructive if uncontrolled' and that 'sexual gratification is not its highest value'.

It is important to note that in consistency with Genesis 1-2, sexual intercourse outside marriage is prohibited, adultery (Exod 20:14). In addition, some specific sexual relationships are prohibited, this includes prostitution (1 Cor 6:15-18), incest (Lev 20:11-21; 1 Cor 5:1-2 and bestiality (Lev 18:23; 20:15-16). Furthermore, same-sex relationship is viewed as sin (Lev 18:22; 20:13).

### **Theology of Sexual Behaviour**

From all that the Bible has said about sexual behaviour, we can gather the Christian theology of sexual behaviour.

#### **1. Human physiology calls for sexual activity**

For proper understanding of sexual behaviour, we need to look at the physiology of the normal human being. This will make us appreciate the urge to have sexual relations and that sex per se is not evil and sin. Physical development and attractiveness of the opposite sex, the development of intense fascination with romantic and sexual matters,

and the experience of sexual arousal are not evil and cannot be described as lust. As Collins (1980:284) shows, lust “does not refer to normal God-given sexual desires, or feelings of attraction toward sexually stimulating people. God has not given us sexual needs or interest which he then condemns as lust. Lust is a specific desire for the body of another person.”

As Runions (1992a:377) posits, 'at puberty, the brain signals the testes and ovaries to start producing male or female hormones (testosterone or estrogen/progesterone respectively).' As these hormones rapidly rise, there is a corresponding rapid growth of both the internal and external genital organs. The centres of the brain concerned with sexual desire are also stirred by these hormones, which lead to the psychological awareness of sexual desire. Gender identity converges with these physiological changes to direct sexual appetite. While girls become cognizant of boys as more than a nuisance, boys become mindful of girls as more than pests. By mid-adolescence, both sexes agree, 'Vive la difference!'

Runions (1992a:377) further explains that sexual arousal can occur as the result of physical or psychological contact with a member of the opposite sex or because of fantasy. Sexual intercourse is the normal adult means of achieving satisfaction of sexual desire. In males, sexual arousal is associated with an increase in awareness of the sexual organs, accompanied by changes in blood flow that cause penile erection. In females, sexual arousal often occurs more slowly but is similarly associated with a heightened sensitivity of breast and sexual organs, with the accompanying change in the blood flow in the pelvic structures leading to erection of clitoris and engorgement of the vulva. During sexual intercourse, the friction produced upon the man's penis and the woman's clitoris by the rapid thrusting movements leads to a rhythmic contraction of the muscles surrounding the base of the penis and the vagina. In the male, these

contractions ejaculate semen from the penis into the upper vagina. This physical release is accompanied by an intense emotional feeling of pleasure, warmth, and closeness. The term *orgasm* applies to the combined physical and emotional experience of both males and females.

Thus, this information on human physiology will help the Christian to understand the sexual pressures upon normal human life and the need to control one's sexual drive.

## **2. Sex is for marriage**

Christian theology designates sex for marriage because it is within this commitment that the qualities of a highly-held view of sexuality can be fulfilled. It puts sex in the context of the deepest commitment one human can make to another: a lifelong commitment to honour, cherish and be faithful until death. When we accept sex and sexuality as a precious gift from God, it clearly sets us apart from those who misuse it as junk (Penner & Penner 2003:19-20).

Therefore, Christian theology is against extramarital sexual behaviour. Genesis explains how the sin of man spoils sex. Nudity became a matter of embarrassment and fear, as men and women eyed each other as sex objects instead of as people with physical differences (Gen 3:7-10). On the relational level, trust and tenderness gave way to betrayal and harshness (vv. 12, 16).

This serves as the background of the Bible's ban on extramarital intercourse. The ban covers homosexual practice (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 1 Tim 1:9, 10), adultery (Exod 20:14), and premarital sex (1 Cor 6:18; 1 Thess 4:3). Even, according to Jesus, the thought of such things is wrong (Matt 5:27-28). All extramarital sex is wrong, simply because 'the body is not meant for sexual immorality' and 'he who sins sexually sins against his own body' (1 Cor 6:13, 18). Field (1988:1932) explains this clearly that,

coitus between two unmarried people is a subhuman act, because sexual intercourse is a unique kind of body language which the Creator has designed to express and seal that special, exclusive, life-long relationship between a man and a woman which the Bible labels 'marriage'.

In sum, the Genesis account of the creation of mankind, shows that in God's original plan, human sexual conduct was to occur within the context of marriage between a man and a woman. So, the sexual union between Adam and Eve applies to all marriages.

### **3. Sex is between a man and a woman in marriage**

The biblical account of creation shows that God created a male and a female for sexual union. So, Christian theology teaches that sex is between one man and one woman who are legally married. Any sexual activity outside this is a deviation and so sin before God.

### **The Christian Family and Theology of Sexual Behaviour**

There are three misconceptions about sex found in some Christian cycles. First, sex is simply a natural appetite like eating or drinking. The fact that we want to have sex means we ought to have sex; in fact, ignoring or stifling our impulses is unhealthy. Second, sex is embarrassing, maybe even shameful, and our sex drive is something that needs to be squelched. Some churches have this notion, and so people get married and have the nagging thought that sex should not be enjoyed. For them, sexual desire is dirty, and so sexually desirable people are bad. Third, sex is a critical form of self-expression and personal fulfilment, a way to find yourself and be truly happy. With this view, sex is mainly for individual fulfilment and self-realisation.

### **Sexual Behaviour is the Model of Heterosexual Marriage**

Moberly (1995:782) rightly asserts that 'the normative biblical model for sexual behaviour is the model of heterosexual marriage: a mutually faithful, lifelong commitment between two adult persons of

the opposite sex. This provides an opportunity not only for sexual expression but for growth in mutual trust, good communication, an ability to negotiate differences, and both partners' emotional and spiritual growth. In addition, a long-term loving relationship gives the needed stability of environment for raising children.' It should be mentioned that other expressions of sexual behaviour mentioned fall short of the basic model.

Sprinkle (2003:752) asserts that although the Pentateuch's theology of sex is incompatible with certain modern theologies that see sexual activities as one's 'birthright', it bases its view on sexual behaviour on the creation ordinance and divine instruction. By this, God sets the Israelites apart from the other nations and knows how to express their sexuality within their covenant relationship with him. 'Failure to control one's sexual expression according to those standards was detrimental to that relationship, to the integrity of the family, to social identity and societal order and to the individual's felicity'. Similarly, Christian families who seek moral guidance in sexual behaviour must make certain adjustments, knowing that the theology of sexual behaviour in the Old Testament is also seen in the New Testament and so provide for the contemporary Christian abiding principles. As Runions (1992b:379) posits, any sexual behaviour which fails to exhibit the marks of complementarity, mutuality, unity, and love is either inadequate or perverse. Therefore, members of a Christian family should refrain from the following expressions of sexual behaviour listed by Vayhinger (1990:1149-1150) and Moberly (1995:782): premarital sex; sex with pay (prostitution); the sexual expression of anger and hate towards women (rape); sexual involvement with children (incest, paedophilia); sexual obsession with an inanimate object or one part of the body (fetishism); sexual arousal through cross-dressing (transvestism); erotic subjugation and submission (sado-masochism); exposing oneself (exhibitionism); and watching the sexual activity of others (voyeurism).

These all fall short of the ideal; however, as Moberly (1995:783) admonishes, in responding to different expressions of sexual behaviour, Christian families 'need to maintain a biblical balance of both ethical seriousness and constructive compassion; to repent of hostility and complacent self-righteousness; and to seek to respond to the complexities of sin and suffering that together lead human sexuality to fall short of God's best purposes.'

### **What Christian Family Members Should Know**

#### ***For both Christian parents and children***

##### *God created sex and it is good*

The biblical account of creation indicates that human sexuality is natural and ordained by God. Sexuality is a gift from God to mankind. Although the Bible is not an instruction book for sexual functioning, it gives a clear picture of God's value of our individual sexuality and his high regard for the sexual relationship in marriage (Penner & Penner 2003:19). God labelled humanity on the gender basis of male and female that is demarcated on the basis of external sex organs, which are identified and classified mainly as penis for males and vagina for females. God's intention for sex is for unity, pleasure, and procreation. Sexual fulfilment and pleasure in marriage are good and of God. It is the misuse of God's gift of sex that brings immorality to the home and church community.

##### *Sex is practiced within marriage*

The Bible designates sex for marriage because it is within this commitment that the qualities of a highly-held view of sexuality can be fulfilled. It puts sex in the context of the deepest commitment one human can make to another: a lifelong commitment to honour, cherish and be faithful until death. When we accept sex and sexuality as a precious gift from God, it clearly sets us apart from those who misuse it as junk (Penner & Penner 2003:19-20).

### *Avoid all sexual deviations*

Both Christian parents and children should avoid all forms of sexual deviation we have mentioned above. They are sin before God. Rapid social change has brought about a degree of acceptance of unhealthy sexual behaviour in society, which has extended to the church and among Christian families. Paul addresses the people in the church of Corinth with affection and firmness regarding an issue of immorality. This misuse of sex was brought into the home of one of the believers and thus into their church. Sex is being misused in our homes today, and thus it is infiltrating our churches. The most prevalent sexual immorality that we bring into our homes is sex on the Internet. This powerfully addictive force is invading the Christian family today. The destructive impact is beyond our imagination. While sexual addictions may control many different sexual actions, the most common these days is the visiting of pornographic Web sites on the Internet. They are available on your home or office computer. You can access them in complete privacy. The sites do not screen for your age. They are available twenty-four hours a day. Thousands of sites are free.

### *Sex and Character*

Sex has something to do with character. The popular belief in contemporary society is that sexual conduct is just a matter of personal freedom, lifestyle choice, and private values, which has nothing to do with ethics. However, how we live our sexual lives is intrinsically a moral matter because sex both involves and affects others. Lickona (1998:305) rightly explains that 'the personal and social consequences of sexual activity involve physical, emotional, and spiritual issues that a person of character cannot ignore'. He adds that 'every decision to have sexual contact with another person raises issues of responsibility, personal integrity, and respect. In sexual relationships... ethical principles of caring, fairness, honesty, promise-keeping, and loyalty always come into play'. A sexually mature person is a person with character, including self-control, responsibility, and courage.



## ***Christian parents and sexual behaviour***

### *Enjoy sex with your spouse*

In creating man as male and female, God not only creates sexuality in the broad sense as integral to created humanity; he also institutes marriage as a specific expression and fulfilment of the sexual relation (Bromiley 1980:2-3). Thus, human sexuality was designed by God, not only to attract us to one another but also to strengthen the intimacy of marriage. 'A healthy sexual relationship in marriage provides not only on-going pleasure and relaxation but a means of affirming one another's femaleness and maleness and building self-esteem' (Sturt & Sturt 1996:182). Do not deprive your spouse of sex. The Bible indicates that it is only by mutual agreement for a religious purpose that a couple can refuse sexual activity.

### *Teach discipline at home*

The word 'discipline' has a negative, punitive meaning in most people's minds. It means physical punishment in many people's thinking. So, care must be taken when it is used in the home. Parental discipline means two things: first, the self-discipline of the parents as marriage partners caring for children; second, the communication of love and definition of limits and extents of the privileges and responsibilities of children in the family. Discipline is a mutual process of teaching and learning between parents and children. The modes of discipline are encouragement, providing unconditional love, and making an adventure of learning with children (Oates 1980:103-104).

Christian parents believe in moral decency and want to instil responsible sexual attitudes in their children. Their task is not an easy one. The sexual urge is stronger during adolescence than in any other period of life, and there is no way to guarantee that an independent teenager will choose to control it. It is impossible, and probably undesirable, to shield him from the permissive attitudes that are prevalent today; television, mobile phones and social through the

internet bring every element of the sexual revolution into the bedroom and so solitary confinement of the child is not the answer (Dobson 1970:169).

In their attempt to teach discipline in matters of morality, Christian parents should be careful not to inculcate unhealthy attitudes that will interfere with sexual fulfilment in future marital relations. Parents have the responsibility to say 'sex can be wonderful' and 'sex can be dangerous' in the same breadth. Thus, they should instil self-control in their children without generating deep emotional hangups or negative attitudes (Dobson 1970:170).

The task of forming healthy sexual attitudes and understandings in children should be retained in the home. In the matter of sex education, the best approach is one that begins in early childhood and extends through the years. Christian parents who resist society's liberalized attitude toward sex, their teaching should consist of two programmes; first, the physiology of reproduction, where the basic anatomy of the human body should be presented, as well as the mechanics of sexual behaviour in marriage. The second involves the obligation to teach moral attitudes and the sex-related responsibilities. The two should go together because 'sexual sophistication without sexual responsibility is a sexual disaster!' Thus, to explain all the mechanics of reproduction without teaching the proper attitudes and controls is like giving a child a loaded gun without showing him how to use it (Dobson 1970:171).

### ***Christian Children and sexual behaviour***

#### *Avoid premarital sex*

Children in Christian families should avoid premarital sex, which includes prostitution, especially on university campuses. To avoid both premarital and extramarital sex, young people should set boundaries. Cloud and Townsend (2000) provide good guidelines in this area. Mentioning how boundary problems show themselves, they mentioned sexual impropriety. It is a fact that dating involves

risks, and boundaries help to navigate those risks. Depending on the circumstances, one can set and use some kinds of limits in dating. Some of these are words, the truth, distance and other people. First, is to say no and being honest about your disagreement; the second is to bring reality to a problem; then allowing time or physical space between you and the other to protect or as a consequence for irresponsible behaviour. Lastly, use supportive friends to help keep a limit (Cloud and Townsend 2000:29). Boundaries are 'property lines' which define and protect you; they help you be yourself, instead of losing yourself in someone else. It is important to learn to value one's boundaries for they protect emotions, values, behaviours, and attitudes. Above all, good boundaries help you choose better quality people because they help you become a better person (Cloud and Townsend 2000:33).

There are benefits of saving sex for marriage: it makes your dating relationship better, because you will spend more time getting to know each other; it helps you find the right mate, someone who values you for the person you are; it increases your self-respect; it gains the respect of others; it teaches you to respect others; it takes the pressure off you; it gives clear conscience (no guilt) and peace of mind (no conflicts, no regrets); it provides a better sexual relationship in marriage, because there will be no comparison with other premarital partners, and free of sexual flashbacks; by practicing the virtues involved in waiting – such as faithfulness, self-control, modesty, good judgment, courage and genuine respect for self and others – you are developing the kind of character that will make you a good marriage partner and attract the kind of person you will like to marry (Lickona 1998:312-313).

### *Run away from sexual temptation*

Anyone caught up in sexual temptation, the Bible's advice is practical. Just as Joseph left his cloak in the hands of Potiphar's wife and ran (Gen 39:12), Paul exhorts Christians to follow Joseph's example (1 Cor 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22). As Field (1988:1932) posits, 'this

is an acknowledgement of the power of the normal person's sex drive, not a counsel of despair'. Paul indicates that the power of the Holy Spirit gives the believer the strength (self-control) to overcome sexual temptation (Gal 5:22, 23; 2 Tim 1:7).

### *Remain virgin*

The word 'virgin' literally describes a woman or a man who has reached physical maturity but has not experienced sexual intercourse. The Old Testament puts a very high value on premarital virginity. Virginity made Rebecca a suitable bride for Isaac (Gen 24:16). As men who were to conform closely to God's standard, the Law prescribed that priests were to marry only virgins (Lev 21:7, 13, 14). This reflects the Bible's teaching on marriage, with its ideal of exclusive faithfulness. The New Testament expresses this ideal by its ban on premarital intercourse (1 Cor 6:13, 18). The Old Testament prescribes penalties for the loss of a woman's virginity. If the man is morally responsible, he must either marry her or compensate her father (Exod 22:16, 17). If the woman herself is to be blamed, the punishment is death (Deut 22:20, 21).

Christian families should teach their children to remain virgins. Virginity is a pride that must be preserved. Virgins should not let people who have messed up their sexuality mock them because it is still pride. People who are not virgins are struggling but will never make it open, but resort to mocking virgins to force people into their zone.

### *Obeys the sexual instructions of parents*

Children in the Christian family should know that since the home is a training ground for growth and development, parents have a God-given task to offer godly instructions for their wellbeing. It is, therefore, for their good to obey parental instructions on sexual behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

Christian families should always consider the cost of being a real Christian. Ryle (2002:174) rightly puts it this way:

It costs something to be a real Christian, according to the standard of the Bible. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, and Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, a race to be run. Conversion is not putting a person in an arm-chair and taking them easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict, in which it costs much to win the victory.

In contemporary society, Colson (1998:299) is right to say that 'the supreme virtue is choice, which should always be maximized.' However, we should keep in mind 'that choice is morally neutral; it is *what* we choose that makes all the difference to individual dignity and social order.' 'A society in which men and women are morally adrift, ignorant of norms, and intent chiefly upon the gratification of appetites, will be a bad society' (Colson 1998:299).

Young people and unmarried adults with strong biblical faith refrain from premarital sexual activity; similarly, married people of strong biblical faith do not practice extramarital activity. In sum, strong biblical faith shapes sexual attitudes and behaviour, even after marriage. They are less likely to think about sex, have more than one partner, masturbate, or have oral or anal sex. Thus, biblical faith can and does continue to influence people's sexual lives well into adulthood and marriage.

It should be clear that Scripture defines the marriage God instituted in terms of heterosexual monogamy. It is the union of one man with one woman, which must be publicly acknowledged and physically consummated. Scripture envisages no other kind of marriage or sexual intercourse, for God provided no alternative. Therefore,

Christians should not single out homosexual intercourse for special condemnation. That fact is that every kind of sexual behaviour which deviates from God's revealed intention is *ipso facto* displeasing to him and under his judgment (Stott 1999:396). This includes premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexual, bestiality, and the use of objects for sexual fulfilment.

The Bible's rigorous containment of sexual activity does not rise from a morbid puritanism bent upon sexual repression, but from a revelation that sexual activity must serve more than physical, psychological, or procreative values if it is to be authentically human. It must also serve the spiritual values of self-giving love, mutual meeting of need, unimpaired unity, and sacramental participation in the relationship between the bridegroom (Christ) and the bride (the church) (Runions 1992b:379-380).

Christian families are called to personal morality. Sexual behaviour is in the exclusive province of the marriage relationship, which itself serves as a model, or symbol, of the relationship of Christ to his church. The biblical norm is that of a virgin bride (and groom) who thereafter live together in uncompromised faithfulness. The sanctity of the human person and the Christian understanding of the body as 'the temple of the Holy Spirit' can settle for no less. In sum, there is no place in a biblical view of personal sexual ethics for accommodation to the moral relativism that pervades society (Horn 1984:1008).

Christian families should understand that 'the stringencies imposed by the early church, based on the teaching of Christ' (Mark 10:2-9), were in studied contrast to the prevailing mores of the Gentile world, where casual sexual relations were wildly accepted and even applauded. Christian strictness is not based upon suspicion of the body, but upon the integrity of persons and the inner meaning of marriage. So, contemporary Christian families should learn to be strict on its members when it comes to the issue of sexual behaviour.

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