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**CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
LIFE IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**

by

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Promoter: Prof. S.A. Strauss

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation

This writing goes out with sincere appreciation for those men and women of God who said yes to the "Great Commission" and brought the Word of God to Africa. The presence of 'great' Christian leaders on our continent is testimony in part to their wonderful work. Even my own commitment as a Christian cannot be divorced from the work of missionaries on the continent of Africa. Whoever reads this thesis must not think that he/she is sitting with a piece of paper that is dishing out judgement on these brothers and sisters. This paper is born out of real concern that comes from a real experience of an African Christian who wants to deepen and contextualise the understanding of Christianity, especially as it relates to marriage and Christian life, in the Church of Africa. The African Christian is in a real ethical dilemma that needs to be addressed right now. The pietistic-puritanical approach to the gospel, which left no space for relating practical issues to Christian life, can be blamed for this. The challenges that a Christian faces in life and especially in marriage were not approached contextually.

The African man sees marriage as the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalised. Failing to address this issue is depriving the African Christian of the unique joy and satisfaction which marriage can provide only if it is brought into the right perspective with the Creator.

As an African Christian there is a constant conflict between my African traditional customs and my new life as a Christian. In a sense this should be

seen as a natural result, because becoming a Christian involves a change of world-view. This change of world-view results in a change in perception of many aspects, which includes customs. It also has to do with a change in allegiance. My problem is not with the conflict per se but with the 'kind' of conflict and the 'why' of the conflict. Part of the conflict as I perceive it is not between Christ and culture, but between culture and culture. One of the causes of this conflict is the way in which missionaries viewed the relationship between Christianity and culture (especially African culture). The other factor was the equation of Christianity with Western culture or civilisation.

We must also remember that the Christianity, which was brought to Africa in the nineteenth century, was a Christianity retreating before the advance of science. It was superior in appearance because the 'carriers' of the message were white, it was based on a book, and it was expressed in a culture which was technically superior. In the way it was presented, however, it often appeared less socially relevant than the religions it displaced. The result in some areas has been to encourage secularism (Shorter, 1973:80). Europe during that time was going through a period of secularism, which I think did not leave anybody untouched, but the missionaries did not seem to realise its influence on themselves.

In some cases, like among the Herero's of Namibia a real encounter between Christian truths and the Herero spiritual world never took place. People were to leave the 'old' and accept the 'new' without a deep understanding of what was happening. The fact that in the 1950s the Herero's broke away from the mission church to form their own African Independent Church is testimony to this. They could not understand why they should not approach God through their ancestors as was their custom. It is disappointing that such a core issue does not seem to have been at the center of missionaries' message of conversion.

1.2. The Problem

1.2.1. The Problem stated

The problem faced by the African married Christian is the internalisation of Biblical principles in daily life. But what are these Biblical principles and who determines them? When looking at books written about marriage and family life by Western Christians, there is rarely an absence of good Biblical principles. But the fact is that these books are written from a Western perspective and are wittingly and unwittingly approaching marriage with Western spectacles. As a result even the writings that are there do not provide a grassroots encounter between the Christian message and Africans in their total cultural context.

The radical discontinuity of African customs, which was preached by the earlier missionaries, created a vacuum among the African Christians (Daneel, 1991:110). "There was no adequate substitution when this discontinuity had to take place and many Christians in Africa were led to practise a double religious existence: with the missionaries they act differently and when they are on their own, they go back to their traditional practices. Thus their preaching carried no liberative and pastoral impact" (Onwu, 1991:149).

The African Christian does not know which of his or her traditional customs are against Scripture and which are not against Scripture. He or she is torn between the two: the traditional and the perceived Christian, which is in fact Western in many ways. When the African Christian applies the marriage and family life principles that he or she learned from the missionaries, he or she feels alienated. He or she becomes a Westerner in practice and many of these principles do not apply to daily challenges. This brings in the aspect of contextualisation of Christianity in Africa which is of such a vital importance. "Christianity has to be made relevant for the African situation or context. An ongoing reciprocation between the text (Scripture) and the context (African culture) should take place" (Van der Walt, 1994:30).

Van der Walt (1994:30) further says, "The context thoroughly influences the understanding of the text. All theologies are contextualised, whether they are aware of it or not. If we ignore the context a real danger is that we regard our understanding of the Gospel as the Gospel itself - as happened in the case of Western theology. To be relevant one has to be true to the context. But the other side of the coin is just as important: to be Biblical, one has to be true to the Text!". Remaining true to the Text is an important aspect which the researcher is determined to maintain, while making his applications.

In conclusion, the problems that led to this research **firstly**, is the discontinuity approach that was used by missionaries exclusively towards African traditional customs. **Secondly**, the lack of Biblical Christian marriage and family life among the African Christians (although Christians in Africa have exemplary lives). This statement must not be taken to mean that Christians on the African continent are more immoral than those on other continents. There is immorality among Christians all over the world. Thus, the statement is not comparative but descriptive. **Thirdly**, the lack of tools and discernment among African Christians to critically look at own culture. **Fourthly**, the inability of African Christians to make a distinction between what is Western and what is Biblical or between what is cultural and what is Biblical. And **fifthly**, the lack of contextual written resources for the African Christian on this topic (more specifically literature by Africans themselves).

1.2.2 A Historical Background

This section will take us back into history so that we can get a picture of the dynamics behind our present problem. Van der Walt (1994:12) distinguishes among three major phases in Christian contact with Africa. "The first one was between the first and sixth century, mainly confined to North Africa, which was finally overrun by Islam in the seventh century. The second was the Portuguese missions between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, but its influence was limited to the coastline of Africa, the Congo, Angola, Mozambique and East Africa. The third phase was the modern European missions that came to Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries".

We are going to pay our attention to the approach of missionaries in the third phase.

Missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. Africa was viewed as a dark continent which lacked religion and sound morals. Evangelisation was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home (Hastings, 1967: 60).

It is not surprising that, as a result of this perception of Africa, the European missionary approach tended to "treat everything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best valueless, and to consider the African once converted from paganism as a sort of tabula rasa on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted" (Hastings, 1967: 160).

Some argue that the European missionaries took their view of Africa from slave traders, because the slave traders were the ones to first come into contact with the Africans. Africans were seen as savage and uncivilised and also in the very depths of ignorant superstition (Buxton, 1840: 515). Both the slave trade and the rediscovery of the Great Commission was a motivation for missionaries to come to Africa. So mission work became part of civilising Africa so that the people of Africa could take their place among civilised nations. In fact the Gospel itself was seen as the great civiliser.

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton who was a Christian humanitarian and Member of Parliament said: "Whatever methods may be attempted for ameliorating the condition of untutored man, this alone can penetrate to the root of the evil, can teach him to love and to befriend his neighbour, and cause him act as a candidate for a higher and holier state of being... This mighty lever (i.e. Christianity) when properly applied, can alone overturn the iniquitous systems which prevail throughout the continent. Let missionaries and school-masters, the plough and spade, go together, and agriculture will flourish; the avenues of legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will

be inspired whilst civilisation will advance as the natural effect, and Christianity will operate as the proximate cause of this happy change" (Buxton, 1840: 510-511).

The Christian religion, school, technical and industrial training, new agricultural skills and commercial enterprise were seen by the missionaries as the ingredients that could bring prosperity and happiness in Africa as was the case in Europe. The technical and cultural achievements of Europe were identified as the fruit of Christianity, so for Africa to advance the same was needed, a totality of Christianity and civilisation.

Long before the modern missionary movement fastened upon the civilisation of Africa through the impartation of the Christian religion, developments in Europe had brought about a virtual identification of "European" with "Christian" in a way that was to affect very deeply the Christian story of Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Owing to a number of factors, not least the Muslim threat to Europe in the European Middle Ages and the experience of the Crusades against the enemies of Christianity, there emerged the consciousness of a concrete territorial Christendom. The weakening of the Christian communities of the eastern Mediterranean, as well as their isolation from the active Christian centres of the Latin West, helped towards the identification of Christianity with Europe.

The fact that the European Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century did not seriously question the conception of Christendom and its virtual interchangeability with Europe, is surely a testimony to the profound hold of the idea on the European self-consciousness (Marvin, 1915: 280-300). Thus it can be argued that by putting their Churches into the hands of national governments and rulers, the Protestant reformers intensified a belief which was already pervasive in the public imagination. Accordingly, the practical necessity of having to deal with the "natural enemy", the Muslim Turk, further deepened the religious assumptions common to Catholics and Protestants about the European homeland of the Christian religion (Hay, 1957: 98, 111-116).

The European outlook on Africa during this period was quite consistent with the culture and economic self-confidence of Europe which had been growing steadily during the previous centuries. The revival of religion towards the end of the eighteenth century which produced the profound sense of missionary obligation, seems also to have intensified this European self-confidence (Warren, 1965: 60). William Carey was one who held no belief in the religious superiority of Europeans or of "those who bear the Christian name" (Carey, 1891: 65). But this in no way undermined the general conviction that the civilised culture and institutions of Europe owed their enlightened status to Christianity, itself the most civilised of all religions.

What was known of the peoples of Asia and Africa categorised them as pagans. However, whilst the Indians and the Chinese could be accounted "civilised" pagans by virtue of being literate, Africans were believed to be without literature, arts, sciences, government and laws, as well as being cannibalistic and naked, and so were reckoned to be savage and barbarous pagans, "...as destitute of civilisation as they are of true religion" (Carey, 1891: 63). These ideas formed part of the stock of knowledge and persisted in the intellectual climate of Europe well into the nineteenth century, when they became fused with evolutionary and racial theories of human achievement, civilisation, history and progress (Nisbet, 1980: 286-296).

"If most nineteenth-century missionaries tended to have a very low opinion of African culture generally, their views of the hunter-gatherers were devoid of any respect whatsoever. A few examples of missionary opinions confirm this. Kicherer, reported that they (hunter-gatherers) had no idea of divinity, that they were utterly disgusting, dirty and lazy, staying in holes in the ground like pigs in a sty, viciously killing even their own children without remorse and abandoning helpless old people" (Kruger, 1995:241).

According to Evans-Pritchard, the task of classifying and theorising on the religion of African societies fell not to those who were the first to have close human contact with African peoples in the African context, that is, Christian

missionaries, but to Europeans who only had a minimal contact with them and who were "at the time they wrote, agnostics or atheists" (1965:15).

In the above-mentioned category were some of the influential pioneers in the then new sciences of anthropology and comparative religion, both of which finally came into their own on the basis of Darwinian evolutionary assumptions. British theoreticians like John Lubbock (Lord Avebury, 1834-1913), E.B. Tylor (1832-1917) and J.G. Frazer (1854-1951) were products of the Christian civilisations of their time, but the nature of their own religious convictions and confession remains problematic. Neither were these writers particularly concerned with the distinctly religious and theological objectives of the missionary movement. Theirs was a quest for the origin of religion in the history of mankind, constructed on a strict evolutionary scheme of development from lower, simpler forms, to higher, more refined and complex levels of culture. Since they associated levels or stages of material culture with corresponding stages in mental and spiritual culture, lower material accomplishments of primitive peoples pointed naturally to equally backward levels of moral, religious and intellectual development. Consequently, "animism" with its associated ideas was simply the religious counterpart to the general social and technical inferiority of uncivilised and savage peoples.

It is not easy to assess the extent to which these early anthropologists and their theories of human cultural history influenced the thinking of the missionary movement. But the fact that the attitudes and assumptions underlying their theories are found equally in the missionary view of African peoples and of African values would suggest that these theoreticians on "other people" spoke for a sizeable proportion of European opinion, including the missionary element.

On the basis of the above-mentioned one can conclude that missionaries arrived, on the basis of their theological perspectives, at the same judgements about the savage and the uncivilised which Tylor had formed on the presupposition of evolutionary development. With little, if any, self-doubt regarding their apprehension of the Christian Gospel, no correspondent was

found to indicate that missionary experience in the midst of Animism had altered in form or substance their impression as to what constitutes the most important and vital elements in the Christian Gospel. Emma Sarah Hahn (Guedes, 1993), who was a missionary in Namibia, writes in one of her letters: "What an honour to be instrumental in sowing the seed of Divine truth in the minds of these poor benighted creatures" (:45). She further writes: "The children are learning from the example and teaching of their parents everything that is bad and sinful" (:83).

The preceding analysis leads one to say that missionary thinking (at least its Protestant wing) in relation to Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century, participated in the general European outlook more intimately than the missionaries would probably have realised.

In this respect the missionary acceptance of the general European presupposition of African "savagery" and "primitivism" had more far-reaching significance than was perceived. Since the impartation of Christianity as understood in European terms was seen as the "mighty lever" without which other means were of no avail to effect "the elevation of the native mind" and the civilisation of Africa, the result could only be achieved when Africans had become like their European mentors in culture. The aim was to produce as near replicas as possible of European models of Christian life and conduct - in effect, "Black Europeans".

This situation has also been summarised well by Hellberg (1997:43) when he says: "The people to be civilised were generally thought of as living in a spiritual vacuum. The task of the Mission was therefore not limited to offering 'heathens' a faith that would lead them to salvation but extended to bringing them up into an entirely different cultural pattern which would radically transform their way of life". What B.J van der Walt says is also of no surprise when he asks, "Could we blame many black Christians who concluded that, in order to be a good Christian, one had to become a white man and thus leave behind one's own customs, clothes, language and values?" (1994:15).

The approach to mission in Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created an alienated man or marginal man who lived on the edge of two worlds, who lost his identity and self-respect, whose culture has been dismissed as irrelevant. This created a problem of identity in African Christian understanding. The redemptive work of Christ was in many cases not experienced by Africans within their own culture. Many did not experience Christ changing their culture, they indeed had to leave their own culture and take up another one. This in no way suggests that mission work in Africa has been unsuccessful. There are many in Africa who made a true commitment to Christ and have been in a process of contextualising Christianity in order to experience the changing power of the resurrection of Christ. "Christianity or any other religion never exists in a cultural vacuum" (Van der Walt, 1994:13). A person cannot experience religion outside of his own culture, but inside. In a little over a decade after the Edinburgh Conference 1910, the missionary image of Africa was already registering some marked changes which included "more respect for the Africans and for their past", which it was now believed, contained elements of a high religious value.

Ignorance was not the major problem of the earlier missionaries. Greater and more accurate knowledge of Africans would not necessarily have created more positive attitudes, for empirical knowledge of Africans and African values is not, in a strict sense, what lies at the center of the problem of the missionary attitude. Rather it is the perspective from which the Christian enterprise was carried out in Africa which is of greater significance. Behind the fact that missionaries were unprepared for a serious encounter with academic or theological issues that would arise from the presence of Christianity in Africa, there lay the long tradition of an unquestioned presumption of European value-setting for the Christian religion. Missionaries, on the whole, saw in Africans and the African environment what they expected to find. In other words, what was observed in Africa was understood and interpreted, not in terms of Africa, but in terms of Europe, that is, of the European value-setting for the faith.

The mission approach of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be

isolated as a significant factor in the story of Christianity in Africa. From this has emerged one major issue for African theology in the post-missionary church, namely, the problem of identity in African Christian understanding. According to Stephen B. Bevans (1992:22), "It is not enough to focus exclusively on cultural identity, but it is too much to lose that identity by selling out to western modern thought". The measure of the problem posed for African Christians by this mission approach is indicated in the following observation by John Mbiti: "Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face a serious encounter with the traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place the Church in Africa now finds itself in the situation of having to exist without a theology" (Mbiti, 1969: 232).

By not allowing in the first place for the existence of an "African" memory in the African Christian consciousness, the widespread European value-setting for the faith created a Church "without a theology". For theological memory is integral to identity (Wilken, 1979: 1-26); without memory we have no past, and having no past, our identity itself is lost, for the past is also our present. The theological problem which has arisen from the missionary tie-up between Christianity and "civilisation" (that is, European culture) consists therefore in this, that it threatened to deny African Christians their own past and sought instead to give them a past which could not in any real sense become fully theirs. In other words, the theological interest in the religious tradition of the African past relates to dimensions of African identity which the missionary enterprise, by its basic cultural presumptions, would have been incapable of reaching.

The massive shift in the center of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the Empires are dead, and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith is largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us - without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: What is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa's old religions and her new one?

That the problem of such fundamental significance for the Christian churches of Africa should also be a direct legacy of the missionary enterprise which was so massively instrumental in bringing these communities into being raises an important question. One may ask whether "the unconscious arrogance of the Western mind", which underlay the mood that made Christianity and civilisation into "opposite sides of the same coin", was indicative not merely of a cultural partiality, but also of a theological problematic. In other words, did the long tradition of the association of Christianity with European civilisation - "the vestigial remains of Europe's medieval heritage of ideas" - have the effect in Africa of turning what might simply have been cultural blunder into a significant theological misconception? Of the sincere and deep humanitarianism of the modern missionary enterprise to "elevate" and "civilise" the "savage" and "primitive", there can be no gainsaying; on the other hand, the theological problems which resulted from its ethnocentric presuppositions also need to be recognised in order to understand the concerns of African theological debate in the post-missionary era.

The world-view and religion of the African people were not taken seriously by most Western missionaries. As a result the deepest core of African culture remained untouched. Christian faith only influenced the outer layers of African culture such as customs and behaviour. In many cases the result was a superficial Christianity. It becomes very frustrating to someone who is used to a holistic approach to life.

The African Christian is indeed forced to practise a dualistic approach to life. "Because a worldview determines personal identity, a crisis in one's worldview also implies an identity crisis. One has difficulty to find oneself! One does not know where to look for solutions for one's problems, be they of a physical, psychological, ethical, social or of whatever nature" (Van der Walt, 1994:17).

Thus our tackling of Christian marriage and Christian life in this dissertation is most appropriate, because an attempt is being made to give answers to some of the questions the African Christian is struggling with.

1.3. The aim of this study

The researcher aims to create an awareness among African Christians to live their marriages and Christian lives in fear of God and not man. This means that the African Christian will come to that stage where he or she can say, "I do this because God says so in His Word". This is not in defiance of any good advice a missionary, friend or pastor could give, but the Christian must always see the Word of God as his or her final authority.

This study tries to help African Christian married couples to live out Christianity authentically within their cultural milieu. Contextualisation plays a great role in this research. But I think the cautions of Bennie Van der Walt (1994:30-31) are worth mentioning here, "The problem is that some African theologians tend to overemphasise the context (traditional African religions, worldview, culture, etc.) in such a way that it endangers the purity of what is being contextualised (the Gospel). Others again overemphasise the Text to the exclusion of the African context. The Gospel should, however, be transmitted both accurately and relevantly. Contextualisation therefore is a complicated process with both pitfall and promises".

African Christian married couples will be able to see cultural practices that are against the Word of God and others that are not. The principle of continuity and discontinuity will be "better" understood in this dissertation. This more especially as it applies to Christian marriage and family life. In order to do this, African Christians need to study their own cultures. We cannot critically evaluate what we do not know. Sometimes the missionaries know our cultures better than ourselves, that is not good. We are born in the culture, we live the culture, so our experiences must be turned into dynamic knowledge.

Christian marriage is very important, because in this relationship, Christ's

relationship with His Church is demonstrated. Marriage is God's institution. As disciples of Christ, we should demonstrate our discipleship in our marriage relationships.

The researcher also aims to contribute in a small way to the continuous dialogue between Gospel and culture. The dialogue is continual, because I do not think that we will come to a stage where we can say, "We know that we have sorted everything out". Our sinfulness will always remain with us and will always affect our understanding of the relationship between Gospel and culture.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Methodology stated

Empirical and literature research has been used in this paper. The empirical research was only concentrated in Namibia, thus to a large extent will reflect groups in Namibia, especially the Herero. There are many similarities among the African peoples, especially when it comes to marriage. After the independence of Namibia, people from other African countries have come to Namibia and they have provided me with good information on their different countries. I cautiously talked to Namibians who studied in other African countries. Cautiously, because an outsider is not always the right person to provide information on culture.

I am myself an African, born in Namibia, Otjiherero speaking, raised like any other Herero African. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour at the age of fifteen. By that age, every African child who grows up with his parents in rural areas knows his or her culture. In terms of cultural stages, the only stage left for me at that age was marriage. I am not claiming to have the same list as the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3, but at that age I knew by name whom I could marry, I knew from whom I was to inherit and what I was to inherit, as my grandmother was older. I enjoyed the respect that goes with being the grandchild of the older grandmother. This is just to say that I

approached this topic as an 'insider' and as a Christian. I was also part of the empirical study.

The literature was very limited. A lot has been written on the topic from a Biblical theological perspective, but little on the issue from an African Christian perspective and by Africans themselves. I appreciate the work done by Benezeri Kisembo and Laurenti Magesa. Many other books written by Africans on this topic use only the sociological-anthropological approach. Thus you will observe that some chapters do not have many references - that is where I used my own opinion as an African Christian. I hope that the time will come where we can refer to more African writers in this regard, especially from the Evangelical perspective.

Christian marriage and Christian life are vast topics, thus the researcher does not aim to provide an exhaustive manual on them. The absence of some issues in this research dissertation is not an accident, the researcher made a deliberate choice in the issues to address. A specific context and need called for this research and it also influenced the selection of topics. This research must not be seen as providing all the answers or tackling all issues relevant to Christian marriage and family life in Africa.

Despite the above-mentioned reservation, a concrete approach to the topic has been provided. Issues that are dealt with have been dealt with in a spirit of honesty and real concern for the African Christian and Christianity in general.

1.4.2. Structure of dissertation

The dissertation has been divided into six chapters. Chapter One is the introduction. It gives an overview of the problem we are investigating. It also provides us with a historical background to the preaching of the Gospel in Africa. The argument in this chapter is that the missionaries were in total disregard of the African culture when they preached the Gospel. As a consequence the African converts rejected their own culture without any

concrete understanding and accepted the culture of the missionaries that came with the Gospel. The result is that we are sitting with a Christianity in Africa that does not give answers to African problems, and in this regard, to marriage and family life. Chapter Two deals with the traditional marriage customs in Africa. This chapter provides us with the context. It gives us a picture of marriage and family life in traditional Africa.

Chapter Three gives the Biblical theology for Christian marriage. The Bible as the Word of God plays a major role in this paper. There are issues that are particular to a specific culture, and there are principles that are applicable to all Christians. This chapter also serves as a reference to the chapters following it. The Biblical foundation that is established here comes back in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four gives answers to marriage and family life challenges. The approach in this chapter is to take the African context seriously and to apply the principle of continuity and discontinuity critically and responsibly. The Word of God has to triumph at the end. Chapter Five deals with the family. The relationship between husband, wife and children is approached from a Biblical perspective. Leading a healthy family life is also a sign of growth. Christians need to grow. We cannot just remain like babies and drink milk from year to year. In Chapter Six we make our concluding remarks and discuss the way forward for Christian marriage and family life in the African context. It is not optional for Christians to apply Biblical principles into their lives, it is an obligation. In this globalising and secularising world Christians need to spend more time in studying the Scripture so that they will know how to apply it in their daily lives.

My stance as an evangelical Christian in Africa will also be evident in this dissertation. I tried to be as objective as I could in my approach, but it is not possible to be totally objective. This statement should not serve as an excuse for any child of God to act irresponsibly, but we must try to make His truth known to all men.

1.4.3. Culture and Revelation

In this short section I just want to clarify my position on culture and revelation, because they both play a great role in my approach to the subject. Different people have different approaches to these two topics, thus it is important to outline the stance taken in this paper. This is not an exhaustive discussion on culture and revelation, I will merely touch on those aspects which I think are relevant for the clarification of my position.

1.4.3.1. Culture

Before going into a detailed discussion on African marriage and Christian life, some aspects in and around the term 'culture' need to be discussed. A clarification of this term will help us all to understand why the topic is being addressed the way it is. Different approaches have been used when it comes to culture. We have seen the approach of the missionaries who came to Africa during the nineteenth century. The whole African culture had to be replaced by a 'new' one.

The term culture broadly refers to the way of life of a people, their traditional behaviour, which includes their ideas, acts, and artifacts (see Bascon et al., 1959:1). "Culture is the ways in which human beings shape their natural and human environment" (Van der Walt, 1994:6). Kenneth A. Myers (1989:30) says, "Culture is the human effort to give structure to life". Lesslie Newbigin (1986:3) gives this definition, "By the word culture we have to understand the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation". "Culture is the whole way of life, material and non-material, of a human society. It is essentially social, the product of a society's tradition and its interaction with other societies. Culture is a dynamic, not a static, phenomenon. It is also the product of human history" (Shorter, 1998:22).

For Roy Wagner (1981), Culture is made up of invention and convention. Convention refers to what is held in common, 'agreed upon' in society.

Invention refers to the appropriation of culture by individuals or groups of individuals, who thereby contribute to its ongoing development. Cultures are never completely closed systems. The aspect of invention in culture does not mean that cultures have not coherent identity, or that there are no continuities in the successive forms taken by cultures. Convention remains an essential characteristic of culture. We cannot learn other cultures except as an extension of our own, however hard we try to be objective about them. But we also know them as analogies of our own culture. Cultures are therefore relatively objective (Wagner, 1981).

When looking at all these different definitions there is no way one culture can be superior to another. Different human beings developed and their needs have been met, so it is irrelevant and means little to come from outside and devalue a culture. Westerners used to think that culture was a unitary phenomenon, and that their western culture was its perfect and most developed form. Twentieth century experience has proved them wrong. Cultures are "objectively relative" (Roy Wagner, 1981), that is to say, the relations between cultures are objective. People belonging to different cultures are able to communicate with, and borrow from, one another.

Language is the vehicle of culture. "It is the grid which connects experience to thought" (Shorter, 1998: 24). Although the nineteenth century missionaries had an imperfect understanding of culture and were guilty of ethnocentrism, they placed great emphasis on language learning, language recording and translation work. They performed a great service to African cultures by making their vernaculars literate and by lifting them to a level of world communication (Lamin Sanneh, 1993).

The purpose of this section is not to give a definition of the term culture, but to try to find a way that can help us to approach the African traditional customs as an African Christian today. The Lausanne Covenant puts it well when it says, "Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic" (see Nicholls, 1979: 15). We can bring our understanding of

culture into the right perspective if we understand it in relation to creation (Gen.1:26-30) and the fall (Gen.3:6) of man. There was purity and righteousness in culture before the fall but culture was also affected by the fall and is in need of renewal by Christ (Eph.4:24). Sin has affected man and all of his institutions (Rom.5:12). H. Richard Niebuhr in his book titled *Christ and Culture* outlined five ways Christians could relate to the world and its culture. Niebuhr's five options were:

- 1). Set faith against culture, a posture that leads to separation;
- 2). Identify Christian faith and culture as one and the same thing, a posture that leads to liberalism;
- 3). Set Christianity and culture in a hierarchical, philosophical harmony, a view typified by Thomas Aquinas and traditional Roman Catholic theology;
- 4). Separate the spheres of influence of Christ and culture, assigning to each specific roles in our fallen world;
- 5). View culture as a result of a degenerate fallen creation and Christianity as a transforming agent.

"Christian faith means believing that the demands of the gospel are from God and therefore that they take precedence over any other values" (Nolan, 1995: 76). Nolan further argues that this is possible in theory but not in practice. "One of the reasons for this is that the gospel always comes to us as an already 'inculturated' message" (:76). The demands of the gospel are always put into practice in terms of particular cultural expressions and symbols.

In Southern Africa the gospel was inculturated in the Afrikaner culture. According to Nolan (1995:76), "The gospel was so thoroughly domesticated that it led the Afrikaner to believe that your enemies or any outsiders at all could be excluded from your love and concern, and that the poor meant poor Afrikaners only".

Albert Nolan (1995:77) also says, "The inculturation of the gospel happens at all times and in all places. That is not the problem; the problem is how to avoid

'taming' the gospel and reducing it to nothing more than this or that culture".

As I have indicated in my writing about *Religious Pluralism* the fifth option seems to be more proper (see Kauuova, 1997:51). Culture needs to be brought into the light of Scripture for evaluation. Only the Scripture and Scripture alone should justify discontinuity or continuity. The missionaries applied option one when it related to the African culture and options three and four when it came to their own Western culture.

Our conclusion in this section is that there are good things within the African traditional customs that we can still practise as Christians and there are others that we should leave.

This thesis will serve as a proof of this approach.

1.4.3.2. Revelation

Our understanding of God's revelation is key to our approach to culture. The debate about the revelation of God is an old debate and a lot has been said in the past (Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, John Hick, etc.). A brief mention of the views of some of these great theologians will not be out of disregard for their voluminous contribution to the subject, but because of the space allocated to us to deal with this specific issue.

Did God reveal Himself to the people of Africa before the coming of the Western missionaries? Have the African people been communicating with the Biblical God before the coming of the Western missionaries? We all know that Karl Barth (1961) sees religion as unbelief (*Religion als Unglaube*). To Barth the starting point of religion is God's revelation in Jesus Christ, as contained in the New Testament. Barth argues that God has revealed Himself supremely in Christ. Apart from and without Jesus Christ we can say nothing at all about God and man or their relationship. Barth rejects what is called natural or general revelation (Kauuova, 1997:29). One can detect from Barth's position that he would not have said; "The Biblical God was in Africa before

the coming of Christianity". As the Omnipresent God, He was there, but whether it was as their God, would have remained a big question to Karl Barth.

Karl Rahner (1975) on the other hand maintains another position. To him theology is a systematic effort to affirm the exclusiveness and universality of Christ while at the same time respecting God's universal salvific will. Rahner also argues that, "Until the moment the Gospel enters the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion can contain for that individual not only a natural knowledge of God, but also supernatural elements of grace. The church will not so much regard itself as the exclusive community of those who have a claim to salvation, but rather as the historical vanguard and explicit expression of Christian hope that is present as a hidden reality in other religions" (Kauuova,1997:31). Looking at Rahner's position one would conclude by saying, "The Biblical God was there and worshipped by the African peoples before the coming of Christianity".

Both Barth and Rahner have some truth in what they are saying. Both positions cannot be thrown out completely without ignorance to God's grace and providence. Denying Barth's position will be tantamount to denying the essence of salvation through Christ. Denying Rahner's position will also lead to a denial of God's power to save whom He chooses to save.

Where are we? Can the researcher argue and say the church through history had created a picture of God which was not always equivalent to the Biblical picture? God has been put in a box from where to operate. The church acted as if she knew God inside and out. But did she really know Him? Why did she not see His presence in Africa? God is so 'big' that the biggest theologian can understand Him and so 'small' that the smallest Christian can recognise His voice. Should we say there was a sense of disobedience on the side of the missionaries? This seems to be obvious when the response of the church to the African customs is taken into consideration.

Roger Bowen(1975:23) makes the following statement, "Because God is

righteous, He is opposed to all unrighteousness, wherever it is found. God is always loving, and His wrath is only revealed when people reject His love". This statement is made on the basis of Romans 1:18-32. Romans 1:18-32 implies that man had a knowledge of God, even before the coming of the Gospel. "Paul was not here thinking about the Jews, who had received Gods 'Special Revelation' as scholars call it, in their history teachings of their Scriptures. He was thinking of the Gentiles, who have God's 'General Revelation', which is given to all men alike. Although the Gentiles of Paul's day had no Bible, they had the 'Book of Creation' through which they could learn about the Creator" (Bowen, 1975:23-24). But instead they have shown their disobedience by deciding to glorify Him in 'ways and forms' they have created for themselves .

Romans 1:20 proves that men see something of God outside themselves and verses 21,32 prove that men see something of God within themselves. "In their minds, men know that there is a Supreme God and that He is the Righteous Judge" (Bowen, 1975:24).

I think that the following four points made by Roger Bowen(1975:25) are worth mentioning as we are coming to the conclusion of our chapter:

1. We should respect all men without distinction, because all have been created by God in such a way that they think about Him. This means that we should:
 - (a) always reason with people, and not assume that they cannot understand God's truth;
 - (b) never despise or laugh at the religious beliefs of others.
2. We should try to build on people's basic knowledge of God. This may often mean reminding them of what they really know - though they may not realise that they know it.
3. As we discuss with them beliefs about God, we should be ready to

point out how their thinking has gone wrong, and even perhaps ways in which they may have 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie'.

4. We should always feel compassion for human misery and ignorance wherever we meet it, remembering that 'Man' isn't 'them', 'man' is 'me'.

The researcher concludes that God had made Himself known to the peoples of Africa before the coming of Christianity. This knowledge might have been distorted, but it was there. "God does not demand what He Himself has not made known. Thus the individual is responsible" (Harrisville, 1980:34-35). God punishes people for rejecting His revealed will (Romans 1:18). "These misguided 'ungodly' are fully responsible and deserving of God's wrath (Romans 1:18). It is not as if they could not recognise God. Nevertheless, the 'ungodly' have refused to properly acknowledge God; thus have experienced the 'wrath of God in their perverted way of thinking" (Heil,1987:24). In my opinion, to deny the fact that the African people knew God before the coming of the missionaries, is equal to saying, "God punishes unjustly". Such a statement will be in complete contrast to what we see in Romans 1:18-32, where it states that God punishes people because of their sin. They were calling Him by Name before the missionaries came here. Many of the African Names for God reflect the character of God as portrayed in the Bible (Namukoa, 1998). When we look at customs in Africa we see in them some attempts to truly communicate with God. According to Vincent Taylor (1955:25), "Romans 1:20 implies the truth of what is called 'Natural Theology', the belief that God makes known His power and divinity in creation, so that men are 'without excuse'".

This fact does not deny the sinfulness of human beings. Although they wanted to glorify Him well they could not, because of their sinfulness. But God through His grace was keeping in touch with His people.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN AFRICA

The title of this chapter might be a surprise to some, simply because we said we are dealing with Christian marriage and family life in the African context. But omitting this chapter, in my opinion, will defeat our own earnest purpose of doing justice to the topic at hand. It will also create an anomaly in one of my fundamental contentions that missionaries did not spend enough time to learn the basic cultural dynamics of the people of Africa. It will thus be a repetition of the past if we today were to give a position to our topic of research without spending time on the African customary marriage. We should not move from a Western marriage to a Christian marriage in Africa, but from an African customary marriage to the Christian marriage. It will be difficult and even impossible for us to try to contextualise marriage without having a picture of the past. Bruce J. Nicholls (1979:13-14) says, "...where Christ is truly Lord of his church the cultural design for living of its members will be different from those of the wider community. There will be a progressive movement toward a 'Christian culture' which will reflect both the universality of the gospel and the particularity of the human environment". He further says, "the lifestyle of the Indian Christian church, for example, will have distinctive qualities similar to those of any other national Christian church. It will manifest the fruit of the Spirit. At the same time it will be a truly Indian church divested of the world view, values and customs of Hinduism that are contrary to the gospel". What I want to state is the unequivocal responsibility of Christians to have a distinct church without contradicting Biblical truth. Customs that do not contrast the Scripture should be retained but all others rejected.

2.1 Importance of Marriage

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate.

With marriage the man and the woman are transferred from the group of the unmarried to the group of the married, and this whole transfer involves a change in status in the society. This change is very important because many responsibilities and privileges come with it. When people have to be served or a decision has to be taken, except for the wisdom of the old people, the society also looks at the wisdom of the married. Being married means one is mature and can make decisions not only for oneself, but also for the community.

With marriage the woman is, in most groups in Africa, somewhat loosened from her own group and incorporated, to some extent, in the group of her husband (see Kenyata, 1959:163). Here she plays a great role, because she is, in some cases, regarded as more senior than the unmarried sisters of her husband. When it comes to rituals where the whole family has to participate she will go before the husband's sisters. At funerals where people usually walk according to their seniority she will go and show respect before her sisters-in-law.

During marriage, actions and reactions take place between the group of the woman and the group of the man, in order to produce a relationship of friendship and stability between them. In this action and reaction that takes place the ancestors are seen as being concerned as much as the living members.

Marriage is the place where procreation takes place. Having children is seen as an important component in an African marriage (Kenyata, 1959:164). Sons are highly valued because they are the ones who carry the name of the

father. Carrying the name of the father does not always mean he gets the same name as his father. It means that he, because of his masculinity, can carry on with the good works of his father after his father has passed away. Girls usually get married and change their surnames and so cannot carry the name of the father or family.

It is also through children that the ancestors can be remembered. Children are usually given names of ancestors and that way their memories are always with the family. Children also provided protection. When there is a cattle raid, children would go to bring their cattle back. It is also children in Africa who care for their parents in old age.

2.2. Initiation Ceremonies Prior to Marriage

Life is full of transitions from one status or condition to another. Africans frequently mark these transitions with collective rituals. Initiation was practised in different ways by the different peoples of Africa. The general perception is that it was practised to mark the fact that a person was moving from one stage to another in life. These ceremonies would usually occur at birth, puberty, marriage and death. Daniel Biebuyck (1968:36) says the following about initiation ceremonies, "They are concerned with the solution of various crises in the life cycle of individuals and occur at such critical stages as social puberty, nubility, investiture and enthronement, adoption into age- or cult-grouping, accession to or promotion in associations, acquisition of specialised skills. Various functions are performed by the groups of individuals constituted through these initiations, which regardless of other characteristics, involve a process of systematic teaching and learning (duties, skills, moral code of behaviour, rights and obligations, supporting texts, objects, rhythms)."

"Initiation in Africa must rather be viewed as a slow transformation of the individual, as a progressive passage from exteriority to interiority. It allows the human being to gain consciousness of his humanity" (Zahan, 1979:54).

At birth certain groups, for example the Herero's of Namibia, would introduce

the child to the ancestors by performing certain traditional practices. These practices entail the taking of the child to the 'holy fire', the consultation of the ancestors and the offering of an animal. This practice also extends to any new thing that might come as a blessing into the family. It can be a wife, cattle, or a car. No new 'thing' was to be accepted into the family without informing the ancestors. Perhaps this is a good parallel to the Biblical teaching for Christians to thank God in everything (I Cor.10:31).

Adulthood in some peoples of Africa was marked by circumcision. A child was regarded to be a man only after circumcision. Among the Herero's parents would refuse to allow their daughter to marry someone who was not circumcised. An uncircumcised man is called *omukaze* (female). Femininity is associated with weakness and cowardice, which traditionally a man should not have. '*Omukaze*' is in fact seen as being half man and half woman. A man must rather be strong and protect the family and the community.

Tribal wars have had some effect on the practice of initiation among some groups. For example, Monica Hunter (1936:165) writes that some Pondo clans stopped the practice because of wars with the Zulu. The practice apparently wears out people and possible fighting men could be incapacitated for a period. "Only a small Pondo clan, the amaNqanda, which at the time of the stopping of circumcision lived in Thembuland and only returned to Pondoland after the annexation, and a few Pandomise and Fingo groups living in Pondoland, retain it" (:165). Where female circumcision was practised, for example among the Ankamba, those not going through the ceremony were regarded as nothing.

The initiation ceremony before marriage was there to help the person to know certain things within the married life. They were taught about sex, how to treat your husband or wife, how to treat your in-laws and other matters relating to married life. This time was also devoted to other aspects of adulthood, for example how to behave like a man or woman in the society in general. "Initiation rites prepared the adolescent for the right use of his/her sexuality, to get married and raise a family" (Kisembo et al., 1977:106). Every aspect that

could lead to the disgrace of family if not adhered to was addressed. Among the Pondo clans it was believed that failing to go through initiation before marriage could lead to illness, failure to conceive or giving birth to sickly children (see Hunter, 1936:165-174).

The Nambyans of Zimbabwe are reported to give a more extensive sex education to their children. When a girl has her first menstruation, she informs her mother who in turn sends her to her maternal grandmother. The grandmother, together with another old woman, demonstrates to her the techniques of sexual intercourse. She is instructed to imitate all the techniques so that she can satisfy her husband when she is married. She is also instructed to abstain from sex during menstruation. Boys receive their sex education from their grandfathers (see Kitembo et al., 1977:125-126). Among the Pondo sexual matters are discussed freely with children (Hunter, 1936:180). Among some groups in Africa, children and parents do not talk about sex at all. Children have to find their own way as they grow. This practice is well in agreement with what Radcliffe-Brown (1950:28) says, "In Africa generally there is a marked condition of restraint on the behaviour of children in the presence of their parents. They must not indulge in levity or speak of matters connected with sex. There is very much less restraint on the behaviour of grandchildren in the presence of their grandparents".

2.3. Premarital Sex Relations

The sexual relations between the sexes varied greatly, depending on the custom of each community. Sexual relations were never promiscuous but regulated according to traditional custom. Virginity was very important among the Herero's. Parents expected their daughter to be married as a virgin. Sexual intercourse before marriage was regarded as a disgrace.

Hunter, who did research among the Pondo, recorded that girls between the ages of 8 and 12 and boys between 9 and 14 would go to gatherings of unmarried girls and boys, and young men, for dancing and sweethearting. After the dancing they pair off together. They lie in each other's arms, but the

hymen of the girl must not be ruptured. "If it is, the boy responsible is liable to a heavy fine" (1936:180). Pregnancy before marriage was a disgrace and the man responsible had to pay a fine in cattle (:183).

Pre-marital sex was not allowed among the Gikuyu. A girl was to be a virgin when she married. Among the Akamba pre-marital sex was not regarded as shameful, but pregnancy was regarded as being very shameful.

2.4. Choosing a Wife or a Husband

There is a general concept in Africa that love develops. This might be one of the reasons why little emphasis is put on an individual choice when it comes to a marriage partner.

Different communities and families approached this issue differently. In some groups like the Herero a man's father usually took the initiative. More rarely advances may be made by a girl's father. Only for the daughter of a chief may advances be honourably made in this way.

Some girls were even given in marriage before they were of age and before they knew enough to consent or reject. In fact, they had no right to reject. Among the Herero's a man could claim a girl of 14 years of age. In most cases, however, the young man had a significant part in the choice of his bride, though his father had the final say.

2.5. Woman's Right to Refuse Marriage

For a woman to refuse a marriage was an exception, since the will of the parents was respected. But in cases where it happens the woman usually goes through a trial time as the whole family tries to convince her to get married. I know of a woman from our village who unsuccessfully tried to refuse a marriage. Her father put all 'mechanisms' (using grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters and brothers) into place to make sure that she was married. The marriage took place against her will, but she later accepted the man. I also witnessed a situation where a woman refused marriage and never got

married to that man. She is still single today.

2.6. Engagement

Marriage in Africa was not primarily an agreement between husband and wife but between two families. It is still usually a process where the two families are involved. The family of the prospective husband go and negotiate on his behalf. On the other hand, the family of the woman gives answers on her behalf. 'On her behalf' here must be well understood, because it does not mean the parents give answers that are based on the feeling of their daughter. These negotiations reflect the total feelings of both families on the issues. The feelings of the two individuals who want to get married are of secondary importance. The woman might want the man but if the family does not want him their stand will dominate the negotiations.

Among the Herero of Namibia the whole process can take from seven months to more than a year. The family of the man will go for the first time to introduce themselves and show their interest in the woman. The other family will just listen and give minimal comments, if any. During this first negotiation they will be saying, "We have heard of your desire and interest. We will tell others and think about it". They will also explicitly state that they are not the only parents to the woman and will have to consult others.

The parents of the woman will then come together and discuss the matter. Decision is not made right away and no-one is expected to give an opinion at the first family meeting. When they meet again a decision is taken and the family of the man is called to come and hear the decision. If it is a favourable decision they are then told to come later and hear the date as well as the bride price. It is only after the setting of the bride price and the date of marriage that the two are regarded as engaged.

Among the OvaHimba *okuvaka* (eloping) was considered where the negotiation process took too long. In such a case the bride price could be paid later. The term *okuvaka* means stealing.

Generally speaking elopement is considered improper. A girl should never admit that she goes willingly to any man. Always when she is married she should weep and protest; not to do so is immodest. This is one of the reasons why eloping is not welcomed.

In the case of a girl who is engaged and one of her closest relatives (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, aunt, uncle, brother, sister or cousin) passes away she is given into marriage soon the next day after the funeral of the relative. No wedding ceremony takes place and only key people from the man's family are invited. This is a sign of respect to the deceased. It also allows for the deceased to participate in the wedding of the woman. A wedding would usually not take place until a few months after a funeral, therefore this practice allowed for the girl to get married without waiting too long after the funeral.

2.7. **Ovitunja (Bridewealth)**

I prefer to use the word *ovitunja* here because I am very familiar with its use and practice. The word has no commercial connotation except to refer to the exchange of gifts at marriage. I think we must accept the fact that it is very difficult to find an equivalent word in English for some of our African customs. Some people use the word *dowry* which I also think is misleading in this context. The word *dowry* originates from the Roman word *dos* which featured prominently in Roman family law. There the *dos* came from the woman's guardian to the husband who became full owner thereof. The aim was to save the husband the *onera matrimonii* or burdens of marriage, and later to secure the maintenance of the woman in the event of the termination of the marriage (Koyana, 1980:3). These English words can only help us to recognise the concept, but will not be able to describe it accurately. Thus my use of "bridewealth" as a variant to *ovitunja* is just for lack of a better word. We might have to satisfy ourselves with dynamic equivalents.

Among many of the peoples of Africa marriage could not take place without

the giving of *ovitunja*. *Ovitunja* is the custom of handing over livestock or valuable goods to the bride's family on the occasion of marriage. However, *ovitunja* becomes exorbitant when it is computed according to the market-value of cattle in money. The view that the man buys the woman by the giving of *ovitunja* is misleading. Women are not bought and sold, though *ovitunja* may come close to this as a result of the introduction of money, and of the bridegroom being assessed according to his capacity to pay. I think that such an interpretation has come as a result of Western minds trying to give meaning to an African practice. The woman does not become the possession of the man, he cannot sell her and has no power of life and death over her. The man is always held responsible for her death by her relatives (Hoernle, 1983:124). The woman can even leave her husband if she is not happy with him and her people will support her if her case is good. Monica Hunter (1936:192) writes of the British official Sir Harry Smith who proposed to abolish what he called 'the sin of buying wives' in Pondoland. She even writes of a mission in Pondoland that forbade the giving and receiving of *ikhazi* by church members and of others who discouraged the practice (:192).

Following are some of the traditional purposes for *ovitunja*.

1. Public acknowledgement that this was a genuine marriage
2. A sign of family approval for marriage.
3. A seal of the marriage relationship.
4. Legalising of the marriage.
5. Economic compensation for the loss of the girl from the home.
6. A sign that the girl was valued by both sides.
7. A safe guard against easy separation and divorce.

2.8. **Counselling**

Among many of the African peoples counselling took place before marriage. Some of the aspects relating to marriage were also dealt with during initiation rites. This counselling was offered by the older people. Giving a girl in marriage without counselling was considered a great shame, thus many would

not approve of civil and/ or church weddings. This counselling takes place at the village where the presence of the ancestral spirits are also considered as vital. The obedience of the ancestors is also emphasised since pleasing them brings joy and prosperity while disobedience will bring the opposite. Children, cattle, abundance of food and many other things are believed to come as a blessing from ancestors, so pleasing them is highly important.

2.9 The Marriage Ceremony

When I talked to two old men and two old women from the Herero community in Okakarara I got the following information:

A wedding ceremony takes a whole week. The ceremony takes place at the home of bride's parents. The family of the bridegroom come either on Thursday or Friday to the bride's parents home. The whole feasting starts a week before the real ceremony.

Question: How long does a wedding ceremony take place?

Injangu Kaahangoro: "One week."

Question: Where does the ceremony take place?

Injangu Kaahangora: "At the home of the bride's parents"

Question: Is there any feasting and when does it start?

Mama Katjitindi: "Yes, it starts at least two weeks before the wedding ceremony"

Question: Why does the wedding ceremony take so long?

Mama Katjitindi: "There are a lot of things done on each day. The rituals that go with marriage cannot all be done on one day. We also do not want to give our daughters so quickly because we love them. Our ancestors will also be very angry if they were to see us giving their daughters so quickly."

Question: What takes place on each one of the days?

Mama Katjitindi: "I will only answer for two days the Thursday and the Friday. The Thursday is the day when the bridegroom's family come to put up their tents behind the bride's parents' home. On this day there is no communication between the two

families. The Friday is the day when the bridegroom's family bring the *ovitunja* (bride price). The *ovitunja* consist of two cows and an ox. Sheep are sometimes given instead of one of the cows."

Question: What happens on the other days?

Mama Karivazeua: "The Saturday is the day when the two families meet after the exchange of meat. It is on this day when the two families start talking to one another. The two families are on this day considered to have become one. The real wedding feasting takes place on this day with drinking and traditional dancing."

Omo Vatira: " The Sunday is the final day of the wedding. The man and woman are both given a piece of the palate from a cow to eat. This to us is a demonstration of the kissing that takes place in marriage. After the eating of the palate the bridegroom and his family are called to come to the bride's home to collect her. They first enter the house where the bride is kneeling. In the house the two families get to know each other better by introducing themselves and exchanging family lines. After that the bride is given counselling in front of everybody on how to behave. The family of the bridegroom is also urged to treat their daughter with care. They are then taken to the *holy fire* where the blessing of the ancestors is called upon the new couple. The concentration here is more on the bride since it is her ancestors who are being consulted.

Question: Does anything happen when they arrive at the bridegroom's home?

Injangu Kaahangoro: "Yes, The two are taken to the holy fire and the new wife is introduced to the ancestors then their blessing is called upon the new couple".

2.10. Children

Children were very quite central for without children marriage was never

complete. Children were so central in marriage that friendship and companionship in marriage occupied only a peripheral part of a marital relationship. Why was this so?

Children linked an individual with the dead and in that way enhanced the individual with the dead and in that way enhanced the individual's immortality. The more children one had, the more children were named after an individual, the more immortal a person became. So long as there was a person living to remember the loving dead person, the living-dead were still living in spirit among the people.

Children were economic assets. They contribute to the economic welfare of the family by working in the gardens, fetching water, collecting firewood and herding domestic animals.

Children increased a person's sense of significance and security. A man who had many children was made to feel very important in the gathering of other men and women. The same person could also rest assured that during old age, there would be children to take care of him.

Children were so central in the community that a childless couple was given a mandate to sire children even outside marriage. Similarly, a single man was excused if he fathered a child outside marriage. The community preferred having children outside marriage to the possibility of dying without children. This philosophy has produced many "Sunday Christians" who are pitifully lacking in Christian depth.

2.11. Polygamy

Polygamy is wide spread in Africa. I personally grew up in a village where there was a polygamous relationship. When I got married in 1987 my wife's sister was being married as a second wife. The practice is still alive although it may have taken a different character to what it was in the past. But a clarification of terms here will be very helpful. Polygamy refers to a form of

marriage in which either the husband or the wife has more than one spouse. The union of a woman with several husbands is called polyandry and the union of one man with two or more wives is called polygyny. Because of the rarity of polyandry, polygamy is usually equated exclusively with polygyny. Thus we will use the term polygamy to refer to the union of one man with two or more wives. I talked to many people in Namibia who had never seen or heard of the practice of polyandry in their countries. But Kisémbó reports that polyandrous sexual unions were practised in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Kongo) among the Wongo and the Djembe (Kisémbó et al., 1977:63). There were different reasons for the practice of polygamy in Africa. I agree with Aylward Shorter (1973) when he says, "It is completely wrong to imagine that male lust or male selfishness is the principal motive behind polygamy. Men could satisfy their lust through adulterous unions and concubinage" (:173). Gunnar Helander (1958:11) who did research on this topic also dismisses "carnal desires and undisciplined male lust as the reasons" for polygamy.

Polygamy is not a function of an unbalanced sex ratio. All populations have predominance of male births and of surviving females. At marriage age the sex-ratio is normally equal. Polygamy is rendered possible by manipulating the age for marriage, with older men acquiring young wives, thereby forcing young males to wait for marriage.

Reasons for polygamy as practised in Africa:

1. security and guarantee of property when a large family community was necessary to exploit the environment and provide basic needs;
2. stabilising marriage and the family through multiple marriage alliances with several families;
3. tightening the bonds of society and broadening the circle of relatives and associates;
4. catering for the first wife's infertility;
5. catering for unsupported women in society.

Although polygamy was common in Africa, it was a practise that was associated with wealth. Parents would usually help the son with his first wife, but he had to pay for more wives himself.

"The wealthier the man, the more wives he will have" (Tonjes, 1996: 126).

2.12. Marriage of Widows and Widowers

Once a woman is married into a family in Africa she becomes part of that family even after her husband has passed away. Thus the practice of levirate marriages was common in Africa. Some people call this practice 'wife inheritance' but others prefer to call it 'the care of widows'. The widow does not become the property of this second man. The purpose of the whole practice is to cater for the domestic and sexual needs of the widow as well as for the procreative needs within the family community into which the woman married.

The needs of a widower were also catered for by providing him with his wife's sister or someone else who traditionally qualified to take that place. The communitarian aspect in African marriage made it permanent and there was always a member within the family who could cater for the widow or widower. Marriage did not end with death, but continued even after the death of one of the partners.

A schematic representation of differences of emphasis in Western and African Marriage:

WESTERN MARRIAGE	AFRICAN MARRIAGE
Oriented to nuclear family	Oriented to lineal family
Contractual	Dynamic
Synchronic	Diachronic
Consent of partners	Consent of partners as members of a group
Absolute stability from the beginning	Growing stability

Children not essential to survival of the union	Children essential to the union, otherwise dissolution or polygamy
More equality between partners	Less equality between partners
Ideal (if not practice) of indissolubility	Recognition of solubility
Ideal of monogamy	Polygamy sometimes the ideal; usually permitted
Extra-marital unions create problems for children of such union	Children of extra-marital unions catered for by customary law

CHAPTER 3

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Is Christian marriage different from non-Christian marriage? If it is, what are the differences? These are two of the questions we will try to answer in this chapter.

There are also different views of what constitutes a marriage. Some people argue that marriage has not been consummated until sexual intercourse has taken place. I once had a long discussion with Moses, a brother, friend and colleague of mine from Zambia who strongly supports this position. He further argued that if one of the partners dies between the 'church and the bed' (meaning before they have sexual intercourse) the remaining partner cannot be considered a widow or widower. Genesis 2:24 was his key verse because it talks about the two "becoming one flesh." Some people have even constituted Common Law marriages on the basis of sexual union.

There are others who use the covenant agreement as a basis for marriage. The wedding vows are used as the key for a marriage (Carmody & Carmody, 1984:39-42; Balswick & Balswick, 1993:19-33).

Another view of marriage is compatibility. This is basically based on the realisation of compatibility by two people. These two people decide to live together as long as they feel that they relate to each other positively (see Piper, 1970:297).

In the Roman Catholic Church marriage is one of the seven sacraments and is seen as designed primarily for propagation. The theologians of the Roman Catholic Church fixed the number of sacraments on the basis of its view that

they constitute a series of supernatural acts that infuse supernatural grace into all of life from beginning to end. "Her theology affirms that the sacraments are outward (visible) signs instituted by Christ to give grace" (Best, 1986:30-31). The seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church are baptism, confirmation, penance, holy Eucharist, holy orders (the sacred duties of bishops, priests, and other ministers of the church), matrimony, and extreme unction. These sacraments are seen as the seven mouths into which the stream of divine life of grace, which has its spring in the cross of Christ, empties itself in the wilderness of human existence. "Therefore, Roman Catholics believe that sacraments possess efficacy because they are acts of Christ Himself" (Best, 1986:31). According to Markus Barth(1979:748), "The thesis, that marriage is a sacrament amounts to a sacralisation or mystification of a structure or institution in human society". Markus Barth further(1979:750) says, "Both the mythological and mystical(viz. sacral or sacramental) determinations of marriage have no place among God's people". Making mating a primary purpose of marriage is a low view of the divine institution of marriage. Marriage includes the propagation of the human race, but it means more than that.

Another view on marriage is the one held by the Mormons. In Mormon theology, marriage is a sacred union, divinely ordained. Under the authority of the Mormon priesthood, marriage is believed to be not only for life but also for eternity (Best, 1986:33). They base all this on the revelation received by their leader Joseph Smith. But this is also against Scripture, because Scripture states that marriage is for man's benefit in time: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). There will be no marriage in heaven.

There are others who also argue that God has nothing to do with the marriage of unsaved people because true marriage is a symbol of Christ and the Church. Contrary to this assertion, when two unsaved people are united in marriage, God binds them in an indissoluble bond. The information that Christ gave the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3-9 and Mark 10:1-12 was to the unsaved (Matthew 23:13-33). Hence marriage is a permanent monogamous

relationship for saved and unsaved alike (Best, 1986:38).

The basic question before us now is what is a Christian marriage? This question is often asked these days. What makes a marriage distinctively and uniquely Christian? Should a Christian wedding be performed in church? Should a bride wear a white gown during a Christian wedding? Must there be a wedding cake and a reception after the ceremony? Is the heart of a Christian marriage the sexual union or a compatible relationship or a covenant agreement to live as husband and wife? Is the essence of a Christian marriage different in Africa from other parts of the world? What constitutes a Christian marriage?

There is a difference between the biblical principles which should be found in of all Christian marriages anywhere in the world and the common features of a Christian marriage in Africa. According to Scripture there are certain requirements for all Christian marriages, wherever they may be. These truths are **supra-cultural**, applicable for all Christian marriages everywhere.

In contrast to these universally applicable biblical standards of a Christian marriage, the main features of a marriage are more culturally determined. These are customs that have grown up as traditions. Here in Africa some of these traditions are rooted in the African heritage. Other traditions have been brought with Christian missionaries from the west. It may be that some people cannot imagine a wedding or Christian marriage without following a certain custom. But we must distinguish between those theological principles, which are universal, and customary features, which are traditionally associated with weddings and marriages.

The features that make a wedding or marriage Christian, are rooted in the teachings of the Bible. The features that make the wedding or marriage African, are rooted in the traditional heritage of the peoples of Africa. It is important to distinguish between the two.

Following are biblical truths concerning all Christian marriages. These

principles are rooted in the clear teaching of Scripture and should be true of all Christian marriages everywhere in the world. These truths determine whether or not a wedding or marriage is truly Christian.

3.1. Christian Marriage Ordained by God

3.1.1 Marriage was Instituted from the Beginning of Creation

Marriage as an institution does not have its origin in man. God instituted marriage. Its origin was not decided at a cultural or church meeting; God instituted it right from the beginning (Olthuis, 1975:22-23). W.E. Best (1986:4) says, "Marriage did not originate in the second chapter of Genesis but in the eternal mind of the sovereign God before the foundation of the world". Otto A. Piper (1970:297-298) says, "All attempts to explain the origin and purpose of marriage in a purely naturalistic way do violence to facts implied even in the most primitive forms of marriage". God Himself said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). A 'suitable helper' for man could not be found among all the other creatures God had created. So God created a woman from the man's rib and God brought her to the man. "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man'" (Genesis 2:23). Thus God arranged and performed the first marriage. For the Christian there is no room to take marriage less seriously than God Himself.

3.1.2. The Importance of Marriage in God's Plan

"Within the family, marriage forms the most important institutional factor. In it two persons of different sex are united with the intention to live together for the rest of their lives" (Piper, 1970: 297). According to the Scriptures, God is the author of human society. In God's plan marriage is the basic building block for all society. Human marriage is more important than schools, governments, businesses, voluntary associations, age groups or any other human institution. Before we read of kings, governors, trading and business transactions, teachers or even friends, we read of God arranging for a man

and woman to live together as husband and wife. Marriage is, therefore, the foundation for man's social relationships. If marriage is destroyed, society is destroyed.

Since marriage is a divine ordinance from the beginning, marriage is intended for all human beings, Christians and non-Christians.

3.1.3. The Value of the Single State in God's Plan

Though marriage is the norm and the ideal in God's creation, there are exceptions. Jeremiah was called to remain unmarried in order to be a unique prophetic sign (Jeremiah 16:2). And today God calls various individuals to a life of singleness. To remain single for the kingdom of God is both a high calling from God and a divine gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). Jesus Christ taught that some of God's servants have "renounced marriage because of the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:12). This is not something that everyone can accept but only for those who have been called to a life of singleness.

Throughout the world one can find many devout servants of God, serving as missionaries and pastors, evangelists and Bible teachers who have been called to a life of singleness. The single state is an honourable state for servants of the Lord called to be single. Churches should not confuse their own traditional cultural values with the teaching of Scripture.

Paul supported the teaching of Christ with his own example (1 Corinthians 7:7,8) and his teaching (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). Comparing those called into certain kinds of ministry unmarried people without a family may be freer to devote themselves to that ministry. Such singleness may enable a person to offer undivided devotion to the Lord. Paul did not say that singleness is good in the sense of being superior to marriage. That would be contrary to God's ordination of marriage for man's completion (Genesis 2:18,24), as the means for propagation of the human race (Genesis 1:28), and as the image of the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Thus singleness does not promote greater spirituality (Best, 1986:78-79).

For others a single life is a better alternative than marriage to an unsaved mate. Today there are far more Christian young ladies in our churches than Christian young men. When God does not bring a devoted Christian into one's life as a husband or wife, singleness is God's will rather than an unholy union. To marry an unbeliever or someone not devoted to Christ is not only a sin against Christ, but also the source of many problems in life.

Therefore, marriage is unlike Christian baptism and holy communion. While all Christians are commanded by Christ to be baptised and to remember Christ's death by the Lord's Supper, not all Christians are called to be married.

However apart from the exceptions mentioned by Christ and the apostle Paul, marriage is the norm for those made in the image of God. It was assumed that the overseers (pastors or bishops) of the churches would be married (1 Timothy 3:2,4). Paul rebukes the false teaching which forbade marriage (1 Timothy 4:3). He also encourages widows to marry again rather than to become a burden for the church (1 Timothy 5:14).

3.2. The Divine Rules and Regulations Controlling Christian Marriages

W.E. Best (1986:4) says, "As earthly things were patterned after heavenly things, marriage was patterned after the divine mind". Since God is the creator of human marriage, He alone has the right to establish the rules and regulations that control marriage. God has stated that in the life hereafter there will be no marriage. But in this life marriage is the basic foundation for all society and God's Word must regulate it. Since God thought marriage was necessary and desirable, and since He is the originator of marriage, only God can set the standards for marriage.

Marriage is the greatest natural unity of man and woman. Genesis 2:24 reads, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh". "This ordinance forms the root of that love by which man loves the woman as himself and becomes the greatest

type of love and life which exists between Christ and the Church” (Best, 1986:9). So important is this verse in Scripture that it is repeated three times in the New Testament (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7,8 and Ephesians 5:31). This is the only statement in the Bible about marriage which is repeated four times.

The most extensive New Testament teaching on marriage and the Christian family is found in Ephesians 5:22-6:4. In this passage the apostle Paul elevates Christian marriage by comparing Christ's relationship with the church to the relationship of the husband with his wife. Human marriage has become a picture to illustrate God's relationship with His people. God chose the Church, God's people. God loves them, provides for them and desires them to submit to Him and give total loyalty to Him. God has the right to question their loyalty and fidelity if they are unfaithful to Him.

This picture of marriage grew out of the Old Testament prophetic analogy of the Lord betrothing Israel for His own bride (see Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 3:6-25; Ezekiel 16:1-62; Hosea 1-3). Arising out of this lofty view of marriage, there are some further important principles which should shape and govern any marriage.

These principles are taken from biblical texts on marriage and other related passages and should characterise all Christian marriages according to the Bible. These basic biblical principles for Christian marriage are important for all of God's people wherever they may live. They transcend culture and are applicable to the Christian Church throughout the world. Wherever a marriage is characterised by these biblical principles, it is a Christian marriage. Wherever a marriage lacks in one or more of these principles, it falls short of Christian standards.

3.2.1. Marriage is Primarily for Human Companionship

Some Churches teach that the primary purpose in marriage is to bear children. Traditional beliefs in Africa also taught that marriage is the obligation of every man and woman in order to bear children and multiply the family, clan

and tribe. In fact some African communities annulled a marriage if the wife did not bear children. Marriage in Africa has been primarily for the purpose of producing children.

Though procreation (having children) is one of the privileges of the married couple, it is not the most important or fundamental feature of marriage. Marriage is not necessary for the propagation of the human race. Marriage is far more than mating. Mating and the producing of offspring take place within the animal world without any form of marriage. Marriage is simply not necessary biologically to produce children. "If that were the case, marriage were relevant merely as a sexual relationship, and the childless family would be devoid of meaning" (Piper, 1970: 299).

According to Scripture, however the primary purpose of a man marrying a woman is to provide him with human companionship and help. "It isn't good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his needs" (Genesis 2:18).

Man and woman were created for God and for each other. It takes the partnership of man and woman to fully express God's glory. This relationship is completely different from what might be encountered in the animal world. Otto A. Piper (1970:298) says, "While the specific ways in which the institution is implemented depend on historical circumstances, the institution itself is an essential feature of human life, not encountered anywhere among animals". Men and women are social creatures. They become lonely when they are alone. More than that, a man is incomplete without a woman. Physically, socially, psychologically, mentally and spiritually man needs a wife, not only for companionship but also to be complete. When God brought Eve to Adam, the man recognised his mirror self in her, that he would be fulfilled and complete in her. She would provide for him what he lacked.

Since marriage is primarily for human companionship, marriage should not be forced against the will of the man and woman. When Abraham's servant went looking for a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, we read that Rebecca consented

to the marriage. She was willing to become Isaac's wife. Forced marriages are unhealthy. True companionship must be based on common consent of both man and woman. There can be no Christian marriage which is forcibly arranged without the consent of the couple. Even when marriages are arranged, as in the Revival Movement, there should be the opportunity for both the man and woman to agree to or refuse the marriage.

Furthermore, marriage for companionship assumes that the wife is not inferior to the husband. The woman has equal dignity and equal standing with her husband before God, though in marriage the woman is subordinate to her husband in function, but not in personal dignity and worth. For the woman was taken from the side of the man as his equal partner. She was not taken from the foot to be trampled on by her husband. Nor was she taken from Adam's head, implying that she would rule over him. She was created to be a "suitable companion" for Adam, complementing him, that is, supplementing him mentally, physically and spiritually.

3.2.2. Marriage is Between Male and Female

Traditionally in Africa this biblical truth is self-evident. Marriage is only between men and women. This excludes all homosexuality. But in the day and age in which we live, especially in the West, God's purpose and plan for marriage are being destroyed.

John Jefferson Davis (1993:95-115), says, "Homosexuality is a very ancient phenomenon, being evidenced in prehistoric art, as well as in the pictographs and hieroglyphs of ancient cultures". He also states that, "The ancient Hebrews, Egyptians, and Assyrians had laws against homosexual practices" (:96). Further, "A comprehensive study of both the Western and non-Western cultures has also proved that homosexuality was not a common practice" (:98). The condemnation of this practice is not only based on the Judaeo - Christian tradition, but on other cultures all over the world.

Different medical reasons that are used by some as evidence of pre-

conditioning for homosexuality have not been proved valid by researchers. For example imbalances in the sex hormones (seen as contributing factor to homosexual behaviour) has been proved by Tourney to have little or no relationship to homosexuality. In his research he concluded that, "the clear implication is that sexual preference is predominantly a socially learned response, not an orientation fixed from the outset by genetic or hormonal factors" (Davis, 1993:99).

God specifically and repeatedly denounces all forms of homosexuality, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Homosexual practices are abhorrent to God and punishable by death (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:18). Sexual perversion, including homosexuality, was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah which received God's judgement (Genesis 18:20,21; 19:1-13; Jude 7; II Peter 2:6-7). The English word, "sodomy", is derived from the name of the city, "Sodom", and refers to "unnatural, especially anal copulation; copulation of a human with an animal".

"From a Biblical perspective, the genesis of homosexuality is not a matter of 'nature' to the exclusion of 'nurture,' or vice versa, but rather a combination of both. Man brings a fallen human nature into a social environment that itself bears the marks of sin, and homosexuality is one of the distortions that can result from that interaction" (Davies, 1993:100).

3.2.3. Marriage is the Union of One Man and One Woman (Monogamous)

Heroes of the faith in the Old Testament frequently practised polygamy without any explicit divine rebuke, for example, Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon. Polygamy has also been the preferred form of marriage throughout Africa. However, the Bible is clear that polygamy is not God's chosen structure for marriage. From the beginning God ordained monogamous marriages. "Polygamy is not simply a husband having many wives, but a husband involved in many marriages" (Olthuis, 1975:23).

Christians find the rationale for monogamy in revelation; the "one flesh"

relationship is exalted as normative in the Bible (Fairchild, 1964:52). Jesus made this very clear when he quoted from the first marriage text of the Bible. When asked about divorce and re-marriage, Jesus answered the Pharisees, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one" (Matthew 19:4-6). Where polygamy is involved the truth fellowship of marriage cannot be shared with more than one husband or wife in the full way that marriage demands.

The man was to be united to "his wife" and "the two will become one flesh". This could only be a monogamous marriage. The "cleaving" or "uniting" which the husband and wife are to experience also indicates the monogamous marriage. This "cleaving love" must be exclusive, between one wife and one husband. The experience of many people shows that a man cannot love two wives equally. There is always a favourite. Illustrations from the Bible confirm this (Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (Genesis 29); Elkanah preferred Hannah in spite of her childlessness (1 Samuel 1:1-8; compare Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

But why then did many of the Old Testament saints marry more than one wife without one word of rebuke from a prophet of God? The answer seems to be that God permitted it because of the hardness of their hearts. He allowed time for God's people to learn from experience the wisdom of monogamy and the many troubles rooted in polygamy. "Although marriage was allowed with more than one woman simultaneously, as when Jacob married Leah and Rachel and sexual relationships with their servants, polygamy was not common in Israel in biblical times. The high priest could have only one wife(Lev.21:13-14), and other leading figures of the Old Testament were monogamous - Noah, Isaac, Joseph, and Moses" (Gower, 1987:64).

When the Pharisees brought up this question of marriage, they were really inquiring about divorce. Having stated the Mosaic teaching under the Old covenant (Genesis 2:24), Jesus applied this to the question of divorce.

"Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). From the beginning, Jesus affirmed, God did not intend a husband and wife to divorce. Marriage was to be permanent.

But the Pharisees were not satisfied. They came to the heart of their question. "Why then did Moses command that man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" (Matthew 19:7). If divorce is not divinely approved, why did Moses, the great Law Giver, permit divorce?

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8). Jesus plainly taught, based on the first marriage text of Genesis 2:24, that divorce is contrary to the perfect will of God from creation. But Moses permitted divorce, even gave regulations for divorce, not because this was God's perfect will, but because of the hardness of his people's hearts.

In the same way we may conclude that from the beginning God only intended monogamous marriages. This is clear from Genesis 2:24. But from the time of Lamech who began the practice of polygamy (Genesis 4:19), God allowed men, under the old dispensation, even men of God, to have more than one wife because of their sinful, stubborn and hardened hearts.

It is true that no word of criticism as such is spoken against polygamy. But it is also true that Scripture describes some of the evil effects that result from polygamy, such as quarrelling and jealousy in the family of Jacob (Genesis 35:22; 37:18-28) and the jealousy and oppression in the family of Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:6). The Bible refers to the trouble in the life of Gideon (Judges 8:29-9:57) and the dispute in the family of David (II Samuel 13: 1-29; 15:1ff) as results of polygamy. In view of the oriental customs, the Hebrew kings were warned against multiplying wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). "It was often pointed out by the rabbis that more than one wife led to problems" (Gower, 1987:64). The failure to follow God's command is vividly demonstrated in the life of king Solomon (I Kings 11:1-12).

According to the New Testament revelation monogamy is the standard and established ideal. Church leaders are required to have no more than one wife (1 Timothy 3:2). Monogamy is the assumed form of marriage based on the relationship of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:23,24).

3.2.4. Marriage Involves a Physical Sexual Relationship

"The two shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). There is much more involved in this phrase than a physical sexual relationship. But at its most elementary level, "one flesh" means the physical joining of husband and wife together. God is the author and originator of sex, not modern man. The physical sexual union is one of the "marital duties" of both husband and wife (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). However, copulation does not constitute marriage. It is only one, not the most important, ingredient of marriage. Marriage is consummated before copulation, or else Scripture would not say, "... there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee..."(John 2:1). There is truth in what Emperor Justin declared in the sixth century; "*nuptias non concubitus, sed consensus facit*" - marriage is not made by intercourse, but by consent (Olthuis, 1975:47).

In the early church Gnosticism exercised a great influence. Believing that matter was inherently evil, the Gnostics viewed sex as inherently evil as well. Instead of the physical union between man and wife they recommended asceticism. Many church fathers were greatly influenced by them, developing negative views toward the sexual aspects of marriage. Tertullian remarked, "Marriage, forsooth, is better because burning is worse! How much better it is neither to marry nor to burn". Other Christians recommended "spiritual marriages". Moreover virginity and celibacy became valued as more holy than marriage with physical sexual union (Best, 1986:77-82).

As a result of this unfortunate negative view, the Roman Catholic Church today requires all priests to be celibate, even though the Bible teaches that the overseer/bishop/elder and deacon should be "the husband of one wife", who is able to "manage his own family well and see that his children obey him

with proper respect" (1 Timothy 3:2-4). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary, the mother of Jesus, never bore other children through a physical sexual union, though the Scriptures plainly teach that Jesus had stepbrothers (Matthew 13:55). Roman Catholics teach that the life of those devoted to the church and celibacy is more holy than the life of the married (see Best, 1986).

But according to the Scriptures, God ordained marriage, partially for the procreation of children. God commanded Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and increase in number" and to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). The first reference to sexual intercourse is in Genesis 4:1 - "Then Adam had intercourse with his wife, and she became pregnant". The actual word for "intercourse", however, is "to know". Thus sexual union within marriage is more than the physical act - a consummation of knowing the spouse fully. A husband's and wife's faithfulness to each other, our trust in each other, our taking unlimited responsibility for each other allows sex to become more than merely a way of passing on life. Sex becomes a vehicle that symbolises the mutuality which a husband and wife have in a language which is precious to both and too deep for words.

However, children are a "gift" from God (Psalm 127). We cannot demand children. Children are the right of the Giver. Bearing children is a blessing to a married couple but not the most important function of marriage. Marriages should not be broken or additional wives taken when God does not give children through the marriage union. Marriage is permanent, children or no children. Marriage cannot be voided because of the absence of children. Marriage is the joining together of two, husband and wife, primarily for companionship and partnership, not for children. Children can no more be demanded of the Giver than any gift can be demanded from someone. Nor is it biblical for a young man to see if his girl friend can have children before they marry. Since marriage is not primarily for children, children should be seen as a gift from God following marriage, but not a requirement for a successful marriage.

3.2.5. Marriage Involves a Spiritual Union

The "one flesh" involves much more than the marriage act. "Sex when it fulfils God's basic purposes, is not merely the union of two bodies but the union of two persons" (Fairchild, 1964:59). The sexual union grows out of and symbolises the spiritual union which should exist between husband and wife. Remove the spiritual union and the sexual union loses its meaning. This spiritual union involves the bond of love. Love for each other is essential to bind the couple together as one.

One definition of marriage is this: "Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the person with another person until death". "Total sharing" is essential in a healthy marriage blessed by God. The husband and wife share their bodies, their possessions, their ideals, their goals, their ambitions, their successes, their failures, everything. In Christian marriage, each one is as concerned about the other as about himself or herself (Ephesians 5:28; Proverbs 31:12,27).

The reason for this spiritual union is that the two have become "one flesh". The two are now a united team, helping one another.

The marital union should be much more than physical union. "It means that two persons share everything they have, not only their bodies, not only their material possessions, but also their thinking and their feeling, their joy and their suffering, their hopes and their fears, their successes and their failures. To 'become one flesh' means that two persons become completely one with body, soul and spirit, and yet they remain two different persons" (Trobish 1971:25).

Physical union of husband and wife is an expression of the spiritual union realised as two unique personalities are united. This spiritual union does not mean that the two individual personalities are lost, but each complements the other. The two persons complement each other to such an extent that they are one in spirit as well as one in flesh.

3.2.6. Marriage is Permanent

Otto A. Piper (1970:300) says, "True love realises that the partner is not merely a body with sexual organs and sexual sensitivity, but rather a person whose special gifts I must learn to appreciate. With such an aim, marriage is not a mere reciprocal exchange; rather, it is a permanent one". Ideally marriage in Africa has been permanent. Divorce was not common. The marriage agreement between the two families helped to stabilise the marriages, avoiding divorce. If problems arose because of childlessness or incompatibility, the solution was usually an additional wife, not divorce. According to Scripture, marriage as intended by God was also permanent. "The principle of marriage is a lifetime contract from which none can divorce himself" (Best, 1986:27).

Genesis 2:24 says: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife". Christ interprets this "leaving" and "cleaving" as a permanent marriage. "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". Jesus added further, "I say to you: whoever dismisses (repudiates, divorces) his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery""(Matthew 19:9). Thus Christian marriage is a life long and indissoluble union, for better or for worse.

When a couple is married they take a public vow to be faithful and committed to each other until death separates them. The bridegroom vows before God and the witnesses gathered in church, to "love [her] and care for [her] in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, and forsaking all others, hold fast to [her] all the days of [his] life". The bride vows to "love [him], obey [him], and care for [him] in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse and forsaking all others hold fast to [him] all the days of [her] life". "That is, married love, Christian style, is resolute love, shot through with decisions that run deeper than momentary feelings and a faithfulness more sturdy than mere pleasantness in relationships" (Fairchild, 1964:61).

But today society is breaking down and the bonds of marriage are disintegrating, both in the West and throughout Africa. Some of the reasons for the breakdown of the family include the collapse of the extended family. When men live in the cities for employment they leave their wives and children behind in the rural areas. As women become more independent through education and employment they are less dependent on their husbands. As society becomes more mobile with people moving away from their birthplaces, the extended family falls apart. The traditional religious pressures which bound families together, are also disappearing. Thus the African family is experiencing more stress, separation and divorce than ever before. But Christian marriage according to the Scripture is intended to be permanent.

3.2.7. Marriage is to be Socially Acceptable

Marriage is bringing a man and woman together publicly and conferring on them all the privileges and responsibilities of marriage. Marriage is not a private affair between one man and one woman. For this reason eloping is rejected in most societies as an unacceptable form of marriage, and is not legally recognised.

Since marriage is a public, socially recognised institution, marriage should not be entered into suddenly and secretly through eloping. Christians are taught to "walk in the light" (1 John 1:5-7). Taking a woman for a wife must be done "in the light" since marriage is a public agreement made before witnesses. Elopement cannot be an acceptable form of Christian marriage in Africa.

Both in traditional African customs and in civil laws within Namibia today, it is necessary to announce a wedding prior to the wedding date. Witnesses must attend. In Africa the bride was usually brought to the man's house, she left her family and was adopted into the husband's home.

The first marriage in the Bible was prior to the formation of society. Adam and Eve were present alone, together with the Lord God who performed the

wedding. But ever since that first wedding most peoples and cultures recognise the importance of marriage being performed in public and in a socially acceptable manner. Christian marriage cannot be done in secret but must be witnessed by others.

Part of this social acceptance is the forbidding of marriage of any next-of-kin. Cultures differ on what is acceptable and what is not. The Old Testament forbids the practice of incest, that is marrying someone who is a close relative (Leviticus 18:6-18; Deuteronomy 27:20-23). Penalties for incest were severe (Leviticus 20:11-21). Even so in Africa there have been traditional standards regulating who could marry whom.

Generally, I believe that since all marriage should be socially acceptable, Christians should be careful to follow the customary communal practices pertaining to incest. Even if the Bible remains silent about something which the culture says is unacceptable, a Christian should not go contrary to the culturally accepted norm. It is true that traditions of taboos in marriage differ from community to community. It is also true that many of these cultural ways are gradually crumbling, but if a practice is not sinful, it should be allowed to continue. If a Christian breaks a traditional taboo by marrying someone too close in kinship, he will become an offence to other Christians. Christians should live above offence whenever possible.

Today, unlike in the past, with people living in the towns and not familiar with the extended family, there is a growing problem of incest.

Within each nation there are laws and regulations concerning marriage. The government has determined that marriage is not a casual affair which can be performed by anyone under whatever conditions people may decide. Marriage must be regulated and controlled. There must be law and order pertaining to marriage.

Thus Christian marriage must be conducted legally, according to the laws of the nation. Christian marriages should not be irregular and illegal. Hence

there should be an official certificate issued for the marriage according to the laws governing the nation.

Therefore, Christians should be joined together in marriage in a legal and socially acceptable way so that their marriage is recognised by the community.

3.2.8. **Marriage Includes "Leaving" the Father and Mother and "Cleaving" to the Spouse**

What is involved in "leaving" the parents? Does this mean that we neglect our parents? God forbids this. In fact, God commands us to care for our parents (see Mark 7:9-13; 1 Timothy 5:8). Does it mean that we ignore our parents and no longer receive any advice or counsel from them? Of course not, for we respect their wisdom of years and experience. We may still receive advice from them. But the new family has become the one which finally decides by its own free consent. "A new, independent societal relationship come into being through two members of two different families" (Van der Walt, 1994:409).

Does this mean that a couple is required to move far away from the home of the man's parents? Geographical distance is not the primary point, for the main concern is relationships. "Leaving" father and mother, means a change of relationship with the parents. The son "leaves" the parents to become the head of a new family.

But geographical distance can be helpful. Some sons build their houses so close to their parents that their chickens can stray and eat the grain the mother spread out to dry. This can create problems for the wife. It would seem best, whenever possible, to build the house some distance away to grant the couple freedom without undue interference by the in-laws.

When a man marries a woman, both of them develop a new relationship with their parents. The relationship between husband and wife becomes their most important relationship, apart from their relationship with God. The

husband and wife become more concerned about each other's opinions, desires and needs than about the opinions, desires and needs of the parents. Parents must not try to govern and control the lives of their married children for the relationships have changed. Parents should relate to their married children as adults without trying to control them.

"The leaving, however difficult it is, it is an inherent part of marriage. If the parents do not accept it, they will render their children very unhappy. Therefore they have to be willing to commit themselves to it even though their son or daughter might not, in their eyes, have chosen the perfect spouse" (Van der Walt, 1994:410).

But marriage not only involves a man "leaving" his father and mother but also includes "cleaving" to his wife. Not only does "cleaving" imply permanency in marriage, but also it implies a "commitment-love" that is essential for all marriages to succeed. Genesis 2 does not speak of love in marriage. Rather it speaks of "cleaving" which is a kind of "commitment-love". "The leaving might be imperfect, and the unity, being one, can fail, but if one does not cling to each other in truth, one's marriage will inevitably be doomed" (Van der Walt, 1994:411). "Truth involves loyalty, trust, love, devotion, and reliability: a husband can count on his wife and she on him. Truth is not an act which occurs now and then, rather marriage is a state or institution in which truth ought to characterise all its many aspects" (Olthuis, 1975:20). The term truth means truth, faithfulness, loyalty, and honesty. The single word truth captures the nuances of trust, reliability, stability, scrupulousness, ingenuousness, authenticity, integrity, and fidelity (Olthuis, 1975:21).

In the New Testament husbands are commanded to love their wives, but this love is the kind of love which Christ has for His church (Ephesians 5:25-33). Christ's love is a "commitment-love" that does not vanish when feelings change. Christ has chosen to love His Church despite its weakness and failures. Christ's love is an everlasting love which does not change with circumstances.

The popular understanding is that love is a feeling, an animal attraction. Christian marriage cannot be built on this kind of love. Love as a "feeling" may grow or diminish. When problems arise love as a "feeling" may even disappear. Marriages built on mere "feeling-love" are doomed to failure.

Today a couple marries because they are "in love". There is an attraction between them. They love each other and love to be together. Love brings them together. But marriage involves a deeper kind of love, what the bible calls "cleaving" and what we would call "commitment-love". True love grows out of commitment to one another. Love deepens in marriage with commitment. Love is a growing factor. The "feeling-love" prior to marriage fades into a shallow kind of love when compared with the experience of "commitment-love" during marriage.

3.2.9. **Marriage is an Exclusive Relationship: it is to be Entered and Maintained with Purity**

Throughout Scripture we find that purity before marriage was a virtue highly esteemed. Levitical laws forbid immorality, including rape, fornication and adultery (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 19:20-22; 20:10-12; 21:9; Numbers 5:11-29; Deuteronomy 22:13-29; 27:20-23). If a man seduced a virgin to sleep with him, he had to pay the bride price and she became his wife (Exodus 22:16). Jacob's sons took vengeance on the Shechemites when Shechem raped Dinah, their sister (Genesis 34:1-31). Absalom, king David's son, took revenge when Amnon raped Tamar, his sister (II Samuel 13:1-39). Even the Gentile king Xerxes of Persia, when looking for a new bride, specified that she must be a virgin (Esther 2:1-4).

This high view of moral purity before marriage is maintained and strengthened in the New Testament. Christ told the woman caught in adultery, "go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). Jesus taught that purity begins with the thought life. Those who lust for a woman in their heart have already committed adultery (Matthew 5:28-32; 15:19). Fornication should not be found among believers (I Corinthians 6:15-20; 10:8; Galatians 5:19-21; I Peter

4:3,4).

According to the Scriptures, marriage is an exclusive relationship. Marriage should be entered with purity and maintained with purity. The man shall "cleave" to his wife and "the two shall become one flesh". Since the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, he who sins sexually sins against his own body and against God who indwells him (I Corinthians 6:18-20). "Reciprocal troth leads to physical union - and not the other way round" (Van der Walt, 1994:411). Marriage is holy, not only because God has ordained it but also because the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ's relationship with His Church. Any immorality is a violation of God's perfect will. "Marriage implies the full mutuality or reciprocal suffusion symbolised in sexual intercourse. Fitted together sexually, the partners are one flesh literally" (Carmody & Carmody, 1984:52). 'Being one flesh' implies 'the playful, spontaneous, free, joyful and complete bodily surrender to somebody else and the equally joyful receiving of somebody else" (Van der Walt, 1994:411).

God does not want human beings to be like flies and chickens. Sexual relationships are reserved for the marriage relationship and no where else. There should be a difference between those made in the image of God and the other creatures in the animal kingdom.

3.2.10. **Christian Marriage is Only for Two Believers**

Because the person born again by the Spirit of God has become the temple of the Holy Spirit, the believer is commanded not to marry an unbeliever. Since marriage involves a spiritual union, there is no possibility of a believer sharing with his or her unsaved spouse in the deep things of Christ. At the deepest level they lack a common basis for marriage. But more than that, the temple of God cannot be united with someone whose life belongs to "the god of this world". It is obscene to think that the holy God, indwelling the believer, should become united with someone who does not know and love Him.

This principle was established in the Old Testament. God first taught the

Jews the importance of not mixing disparate things. "Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together;" (Deuteronomy 22:10). "Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material" (Leviticus 19:19).

Why should God be concerned about such things? He was laying down the principle that certain things do not belong together. The holy should not be mixed with the unholy. Isaiah taught, "Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:11).

These verses certainly do not forbid inter-tribal or inter-racial marriages, as some people suggest. Inter-tribal or inter-racial marriages may have some potential problems, which one needs to consider carefully before marriage. However, nowhere does the Bible forbid such marriages. The principle taught here is that the holy should not mingle with the unholy. The godly should not marry the ungodly.

Some Christian parents have actually made unfortunate decisions for their children. Some have forbid a daughter to marry a young man from another tribe but then they allow the same daughter to marry someone who is not a committed Christian. The Bible allows inter-tribal and inter-racial marriages but forbids marriages between the children of God and those who are not saved.

This separation between the holy and the unholy is reaffirmed in the New Testament. "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:19). The world is composed of those who do not know the Lord Jesus. The unsaved in the world do not have eternal life within them. Thus the world hates the true believers because they are not of the world. There is an inevitable difference to be made, a separation between the two. Paul also taught, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). Built

upon this principle, both the Old Testament and the New Testament forbid the believer from marrying an unbeliever.

God forbid the Jews from marrying Gentiles, lest the Jewish believers should be led away from the Lord to serve heathen gods (Deuteronomy 7:1-5). The basic problem was not inter-racial marriages, Gentiles marrying Jews. The issue was that Jewish believers should not marry Gentile unbelievers.

However, this inter-marriage became a frequent problem among the Jews and led to God's judgement. After the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they began to marry the daughters of the Gentile nations and they began to forget the Lord. Consequently, God became angry with them and sold them into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia (Judges 3:5-8).

This problem continued even after the exile. Nehemiah cursed them and pulled out the hair of those who had intermarried. He made them take an oath that they would not marry their sons and daughters to the neighbouring unbelieving Gentiles. He further contended with them, saying, "Was it not because of marriage like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? But even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?" (Nehemiah 13:26-28).

God repeatedly reprimanded the children of Israel for marrying unbelieving Gentiles. The prophet Malachi preached, "Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary which the Lord love, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty" (Malachi 2:11,12). The problem was not that the Jews married Gentiles but that the Jewish believers were marrying unbelievers who were sons and daughters of foreign gods.

Ezra tore his garments, pulled out some of his own hair and sat down

appalled. Why? Because "The people of Israel... have not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring peoples with their detestable practices... They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them" (Ezra 9:1-2).

This fundamental teaching in the Old Testament is repeated in the New Testament. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (I Corinthians 6:14-16).

Marriage involves the union of a man and woman. But Amos asks, "Can two walk together, except if they agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Marriage requires a considerable measure of harmony, agreement and having many things in common. One's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ transforms a believer into a new person (I Corinthians 5:17). It is impossible for a believer and an unbeliever to be truly united, since only one serves the Lord while the other serves the Devil. Therefore, the command is, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers".

CHAPTER 4

A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE IN AFRICA

Among the African peoples marriage was not considered a one time event, it was considered to be a process. Christians today tend to follow the same pattern. After the marriage agreement the young people would normally inform their parents to do the negotiations. *Ovitunja* is also paid.

The first part of this chapter will compare and contrast Hebrew marriages, traditional African marriages and Christian marriages. We shall also deal with some aspects within the African customary marriage. These aspects are cultural and relative. They have value because of the particular value attached to them by the specific cultural group. The absence or presence of those aspects will not make a Christian marriage un-Christian.

When examining the African Independent Churches it is clear that a lot of their teachings and practises are based on the Old Testament. Many African people feel more at home with the Old Testament than with the New Testament. The reason given is that the Old Testament is very close to the African customs and practises. The Old Testament is cited as their foundation for the practise of polygamy and sacrifices. There are similarities between the African customs and some of the customs in the Old Testament (see Inus Daneel, 1987).

4.1 COMPARISONS BETWEEN MARRIAGES

4.1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE

(a) Hebrew Marriages

Celibacy was never considered a virtue in Jewish thought. Marriage and the

raising of a family were regarded as holy duties to be fulfilled as early in a person's adult life as possible.

Ben Sira wrote:

*He that getteth a wife (getteth) the choicest possession,
A help-meet for him and a pillar of support.
Without a hedge the vineyard is laid waste
And without a wife (a man is) a wanderer and homeless.
Who trusteth an armed band that rusheth from city to city?
So is the man that hath no nest,
Who resteth where evening befalls him (see Archer, 1990: 124).*

The concern for children and the continuation of the family line was very important. The Pseudo-Phocylides expressed this matter this way:

*Remain not unmarried, lest you die nameless.
Give nature her due: beget in turn as you were begotten (: 24)*

Not only was it important for men to get married but for women too. The rabbis even declared that a woman should tolerate an unhappy marriage rather than remain alone and even advised parents to manumit a slave for the purpose of marriage if their daughter had reached adulthood without having secured a husband.

(b) **African Traditional Marriages**

We have already highlighted the fact that for African peoples marriage is the focus of existence. Therefore marriage is seen as a requirement for men and women. Looking at this and what was said before about marriage among the traditional Africans the similarities in perception are clear.

(c) **The Position of Missionaries**

The missionaries who came to Africa encouraged and promoted marriage.

Marriage was seen as a cure for immorality, which was perceived as abounding in Africa. Most of the Christians in mission Churches got married. Singleness was not even considered as a topic to discuss.

(d) **Christian Marriages Today**

Many Churches today also encourage marriage. It is seen by many Churches as a strengthening force for the Christian community.

4.1.2 CONSENT OF THE FAMILY

(a) **Hebrew Marriages**

It was the responsibility of the father to look for a wife for his son. "Young people did not normally decide whom they would marry. It was marriage first and love afterwards" (Gower, 1987:64). Characteristically Jewish in courtship and matchmaking was the concern for purity of lineage, that is, the certainty that in neither family was there any suspicion of irregular ancestry that could make the present descendants forbidden or undesirable marriage partners. The whole arrangement and selection was the parents' responsibility (Genesis 21:21). "The practice of arranging marriages did not mean that parents did not consider the feelings of their children or that love did not sometimes happen before marriage" (Gower, 1987:64). There are also cases where the woman was asked to give consent, like Rebecca (Genesis 24:58).

Usually sons would agree with their parents on a selected partner, but there is the example of Esau who did not agree with his parents (Genesis 26:34,35). Sometimes the sons chose the bride while the parents were negotiating, like in the case of Samson (Judges 14:2).

(b) **African Traditional Marriages**

Parents took the full responsibility. Consultation was rare. The whole extended family had input, but the view of the groom was not considered

essential. This also shows a similarity between Hebrew and African marriage.

(c) **The Position of Missionaries**

The missionaries in most of the African countries encouraged the involvement of parents. They in fact required the agreement of both families before the wedding could take place.

(d) **Christian Marriage Today**

Parents here are also involved but in different capacity. Christian men and women have to get married to fellow Christians and naturally limit the input of parents in choosing. Parents are informed and consulted to give their opinion although, in many cases, their dislike probably will not bring any change of opinion in the mind of the Christian. On the whole, parental guidance is not ignored as their experience in certain areas might be of help to the young Christian.

However it is a pity today that some Christians do get married without even informing their parents. In many cases the opinion of non-Christian parents is regarded as valueless and less Christians go to their parents when they want to get married. A lot has been said on culture in earlier chapters and should serve as guidance for this topic too.

Under no circumstance should a Christian get married to a non-Christian as it is against the will of God. The Christian, as a member of the body of Christ, should get married to another member of the body of Christ. More about this will be said in other chapters.

4.1.3 ENGAGEMENT

(a) Hebrew Marriages

Betrothal and marriage involved a lengthy process of steps and customs. A candidate for marriage had to have both family lineage and ceremonial status agreeable to the family of the prospective mate. Betrothal (*erusin*) represented the full consummation of the marriage. From that moment on, the betrothed (or, *auras*) was in every respect the wife of her husband. But the wife still remained at her father's house. Betrothal involved both financial and legal implications. Formal betrothal took place in the home of the bride's father, where the groom gave the bride money or something of value as token of his intention. He also presented a written marriage contract listing his responsibilities and the amount of money she would receive at his death or in case of divorce. This was a festive occasion (see Safrai, et al., 1976:752-760).

This explains perhaps why the Bible uses the word "divorce" in the case of Joseph and Mary. Betrothal, as explained before, was regarded as marriage and that is why in the case of Joseph, the Bible talks of him wanting to divorce Mary (Matthew 1:18,20). "The betrothal could be broken only by a legal transaction (in effect, a divorce), and the ground for such termination was adultery" (Gower, 1987:65).

(b) African Traditional Marriages

Betrothal here involved agreement on the *ovitunja* (bridewealth). This does not necessarily mean that the family of the groom has input in what has to be paid. Their agreement to pay whatever is set is taken as betrothal. Among some groups payment of some kind is made with betrothal.

(c) The Position of Missionaries

Missionaries did not agree with the drinking of alcohol that takes place amongst some groups with betrothal. They also discouraged women from

eloping. On the practice of the bride price they advised parents not to make it too high. In some cases they even encouraged parents to cease the whole practice and to put more emphasis on the Christian meaning of marriage.

(d) **Christian Marriage Today**

Many Christians today get engaged before marriage and little emphasis is put on having big parties. Drinking of alcohol is mainly, absent. In some churches in Namibia inviting parents to an engagement party is insignificant since they see engagement as having taken place with the setting of the bridewealth. However parental involvement is very important. Even if they do not come they need to be informed. For example, among the Herero people where the setting of the price is seen as the time of betrothal, it is important for the Christian man who wants to give a ring to his future bride to do it after the parents have finalised the bridewealth. It is seen as a sign of great disrespect to put on an engagement ring before both parents have agreed on the terms of marriage.

4.1.4 **PREMARITAL PURITY**

(a) **Hebrew Marriages**

The Hebrews considered purity before marriage as very important. Virginity was highly valued and the bride had to give evidence to it by providing a blood stained clothes after the first sexual intercourse with her husband. "The blood stained bed-coverings were shown to demonstrate that the bride had been a virgin" (Gower, 1987:69). In some cases "the groom and the bride were examined prior to the wedding in order to preclude all fraud as regards virginal blood" (Safrai, et al., 1987:759).

(b) **African Traditional Marriages**

Not all African people had high regard for purity before marriage. For further details see chapter 2 on "Traditional Marriage Customs in Africa".

(c) **The Position of Missionaries**

Missionaries have been teaching purity before marriage as the Biblical standard. If any impurity took place, people were put under Church discipline for a period of time. During such discipline people could not take Holy Communion or perform any public Church function. If the person was a leader he was removed from that role.

(d) **Christian Weddings Today**

The Christian Church today teaches the importance of purity for the Christian Church. The Church is called to be holy, because the God we serve is Holy. Christians have to pay more attention to this aspect as Satan is increasingly tempting the Church in this area. Christians have been called to be 'different'. Christ has separated us from this world to live for him. The Christian must become more and more like Christ.

4.1.5 WEDDING CEREMONY

(a) **Hebrew Marriages**

According to J. Julius Scott (1995:250), marriage took place when both the bride and groom felt ready. There were prescribed stages for the wedding celebration:

1. the preparation of the bride,
2. the transfer of the bride from her father's home to that of the groom,
3. the bride's introduction into the home of the groom, and
4. blessings and festivities within the husband's home

When the bride was a virgin, it was customary for her to wear her hair loose, and special hymns were sung. Roast ears of corn were cast on the way before a virgin's procession, and wine and oil were poured before all brides and

grooms. Wedding processions and festivities were held towards evening, and it was customary to accompany the bride with torches to add to the festivity. In the story told by Jesus, the bride and groom were later than expected so the oil in lamps began to run low. Only those who had brought a reserve flask of oil were able to refill their lamps and welcome the bride and groom (see Matthew 25:1-13). "Blessings, requiring a quorum of ten men, were recited during the wedding ceremony and during the whole festival" (Safrai, 1987:759).

The wedding ceremony was essentially the groom's introduction of the bride into his house. The bride was usually adorned with special jewellery and special clothing (Psalm 45:13,14; Isaiah 61:10). "The dressing up for the wedding was so important that it was unforgettable" (Gower, 1987:66). Rebecca placed a veil over her face when she was brought to the home of Isaac for her wedding (Genesis 24:65). In similar way, Revelation 19:8; 21:2 refers to the white garments which the Church, the Bride of Christ, will wear at the wedding of the Lamb.

(b) **African Traditional Weddings**

Customs in Africa differ, but the bride wore special jewellery and clothing when she was taken to the home of her bridegroom. Blessings were pronounced on the new couple and a great celebration with drinking and feasting followed.

(c) **The Position of Missionaries**

Often people could not afford big parties before weddings. The missionaries even discouraged such parties as they could end up being misused. The expenses were minimal. The two were taken into the Church where they were pronounced as husband and wife. Missionaries gave them counselling as to how they should live as a married couple. After the ceremony there was a small reception with not alcohol.

4.1.6 WEDDING RECEPTION

(a) Hebrew Marriages

After the wedding there was a wedding supper (Matthew 25:1-13). Feasting and rejoicing with food was usually held in the house of the groom's parents or the house of the groom (Matthew 22:1-10; John 2:9). Many relatives and friends attended (John 2:3). Sometimes the wedding festivities continued for one week or longer (Genesis 29:27).

Blessings were pronounced on the couple by the parents (Genesis 24:60; Ruth 4:11) and a covenant of faithfulness was made (implied in Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16:8; Malachi 2:14).

(b) African Traditional Wedding

Eating and drinking in a party was always part of the African wedding. These parties were often held at night with much dancing, drinking and eating.

(c) The Position of Missionaries

Marriages of couples which were held in the church office because of impurity before marriage had no receptions. Receptions for church weddings were not required and were usually small. Only a few people from the community were invited, usually Christians. People were not invited from a distance. These receptions were held in the man's house with little food. No wedding gifts were given.

How then did the weddings and wedding receptions become more elaborate and expensive? The introduction of the bridal gown, many attendants, wedding cake and so on must have come from watching and imitating the Europeans, both the colonialists and the missionaries who married in Africa. Missionaries wanted to make the weddings look smart and attractive, something to be desired. So they baked the cakes and provided the clothes

and helped couples financially to conduct an attractive wedding for all to see. Thus began the process of developing more and more expensive weddings.

(d) **Christian Marriages Today**

In many cases the wedding receptions have become expensive with large numbers being invited and much food served. The result is that many couples marrying in church need much financial assistance with pre-wedding parties. Many go into debt. Many others simply do not have a Christian wedding because of the great expense.

4.1.7 CONCLUSION

There is great continuity and similarity between the customs of marriage among the Hebrews in Bible times and among traditional Africans.

But there are some significant differences between Christian marriage today according to the Scriptures and traditional African marriages in the past. These are generally religious and moral.

Premarital sex is forbidden by the Scriptures but allowed by some African communities. Though some African communities forbid premarital sexual intercourse, they encourage or tolerate sex play.

Exchange and drinking of beer was closely associated with marriage arrangements traditionally. But in most Christian churches today this is not acceptable.

Traditionally, certain religious rites and ceremonies were practised, such as consultation of the ancestors. But this is forbidden in Christian churches today.

The church wedding is quite different from the traditional wedding ceremony. Because it contains many Christian elements combined with western

elements brought by the missionaries.

But in many other ways, the Christian church has accommodated herself to traditional forms of marriage. Marriages are only made through agreements made by the families of the young man and woman and are usually sealed with bride price. Some traditional customs like the playful snatching of the bride or the sacrifice of a goat to signal the release of the girl from her maternal home are still followed. The non-Christian community also accommodates itself to the Christian conscience by not requiring all the traditional practices prior to the marriage, such as the use of beer.

Yes, there is great continuity between traditional patterns of marriage in Africa and Christian marriage today. But with the incursion of western values of individualism, growth of schooling (education) and urbanisation, we see a breakdown of the traditional family. Many times youth are allowed to do their own thing without firm guidelines from the parents. Unless the Christian church enters the void to fill the gap left by the loss of traditional values, marriage and family will disintegrate.

We should observe, however, that all these customs associated with marriage are customary and traditional. They do not necessarily relate to the basic essentials of a Christian wedding. They are traditions handed down from one generation to another. It is quite amazing how similar the Hebrew traditions of marriage are to the African traditions. Westernization has brought many changes on the contemporary scene, which are cherished by many Christians and church leaders. These customs, however, are not sacred in themselves.

4.2 COURTING AND DATING

This section is also key to any discussion about Christian marriage. On one hand there are young people who come from a background where the parents choose the life partner. There are also young Christian parents who are torn between two systems and wondering whether they should choose for their sons and daughters or not. Should the sons and daughters choose partners

for themselves and how? [Important guidelines will be provided to parents and children in this section. Marriage cannot be discussed without discussing the choosing of a partner. The choosing process can prevent problems that sometimes occur in marriage. The practical guidelines in this section should help the Christian Church in Africa in her preparation for young people to make the right choice.

4.2.1 Preparation for marriage in African Tradition

Most African societies were graded into different age groups. To be accepted and appreciated by the community, one had to know his or her place in society, how he or she related to others in the different age groups. Social obligations, the kinds of food eaten, manners, dress and conduct were all determined by the age group one was in.

4.2.1.1 Preparation by Example

Education was practical throughout life, preparing an individual to assume new responsibilities in each age group. One learned by watching others and then copying them. That is, one learned as an apprentice does, by watching others work and learning from them.

As girls watched their mothers, they learned how to cook, care for the home, work in the gardens and milk the cows. So much of a girl's training for the responsibilities of marriage came through daily association with her mother. As the boys cared for the domestic animals and hunted for wild animals, they learned how to do the man's work.

Personal relations were of primary concern in African education. Knowing how to behave toward others in the different age groups was of great importance. The younger must learn respect toward the older. The older ones no longer participated in the same activities of the younger.

4.2.1.2 Preparation by Teaching

Children learned much from their grandparents. In the evenings the children often went to the hut of their grandparents to talk and eat together. Through these conversations the children and young people learned how to be prepared for the future. This included moral teachings of what to do and what not to do.

They learned about relationships - who were their relatives, and who they should not marry because of being too closely related. They were told of other families they should not marry into because of some quarrel with them in the past.

Grandparents were not embarrassed to speak about personal matters, preparing children for marriage. Parents were not free to share openly about issues of sex, the grandparents were the teachers in these matters. Guidance and counsel was given about the procedures of marriage. They learned what they should do if their wife or husband died or if their wife did not have children.

These were the times when the young people were really prepared with teaching for marriage. After the initiation ceremony the young men and women would never think of going back to their grandparents for instruction.

4.2.1.3 The Initiation Ceremony

Prior to initiation, no boy or girl was prepared for marriage, for they were still considered children by society. The initiation ceremony was the time when a girl became a woman and a boy became a man. Through the physical operation of circumcision among some communities, through various tests of physical endurance, through teaching how ^{an} adult should care for his house as an adult, through various rites and ceremonies, the person became an adult and was no longer a child. During initiation the girls learned how to handle their husband and home, what to do if problems arose with their husbands

and many other similar issues.

The difference between a circumcised and uncircumcised person was very great. It was absolutely forbidden for an uncircumcised boy to have intercourse with a woman.

4.2.2 Preparation for Marriage Among Christians Today

Much of African tradition is either disappearing or changing. While young people were prepared for marriage in the past, this training has been lost today. How will the church prepare her youth for marriage today? If our young people are to be adequately trained and prepared for marriage, the church must step in and assist in this process through supervised teaching.

4.2.2.1 Teaching the Youth Through the Church

God has provided the church with various tools, which can be utilised to prepare young men and women for marriage. This includes Christian parents, their pastors and Youth Groups. Following are the recommended ways of preparing youth for marriage.

4.2.2.2 Counselling of Children and Youth by their Parents

Parents are the ones who should model before their children the ideal husband and wife for their children to imitate. As children grow up in a home where the husband and wife love one another and help one another, the children learn by their example. It is in homes where there are quarrels leading to divorce that the young people learn wrong attitudes toward marriage. Teaching the roles of a husband and wife without the opportunity of seeing this in action is very ineffective. Modeling of relationships is far more important than verbal teaching.

As the children help in the home, assisting their father and mother, they can learn more than the skills needed to care for a home. During this time the

parents have opportunities to advise and counsel on the kind of young man or young woman who would make an ideal husband or wife. Warnings can be given about the consequences of marrying the wrong person. Teaching in the past was not in formal surroundings within a classroom. The best kind of teaching today is still natural, spontaneous and related to life. The parents are the best ones to teach their children.

When parents are with their children as they grow up they are able to exercise a measure of control over them so that they learn about sex and marriage within a context of Christian morality rather than within a context of experimentation. Parents have a responsibility to oversee the kinds of friends their children have so that they will grow and mature among morally upright youth instead of immoral and undisciplined youth.

Family worship in the home is a wonderful opportunity of teaching children the Word of God and instructing them in the ways of Christian living. Parents who neglect daily family worship are neglecting their responsibility to train their children. A father and mother who meet with their children regularly to sing God's praise, memorise Scripture, discuss its application to life and pray together will find many opportunities of advising and counselling their children to prepare for marriage in a Christian way.

Traditionally, parents were not the ones to teach personal, sensitive topics like sexual relations to their children. This was done by older people. Therefore, the church should arrange for this to be done by others. Depending on parents to do this would be unwise. Hoping that the youth will learn these things in a Christian context somewhere else is also unwise. For it will never happen unless the church plans for it. The church must make arrangements for this to be done.

4.2.2.3 Youth Groups and Camps

Youth groups and camps in practice have taken the place of initiation ceremonies in many areas.

They have formed a kind of functional substitute where the youth can gather, participate in youthful activities and be taught.

Youth camps provide a place for youth from many different churches to become acquainted in a Christian environment and with supervision. Various youth camp programmes should be prepared to train the youth in different phases of marriage preparation. They should be taught how to choose a spouse, the importance of parental and family involvement, the value of engagement and a Christian wedding. They should be taught the importance of purity before marriage and within marriage. Teaching the youth about sex, including the sanctity of sex, should be provided. Why should the church leave these matters to the school without moral principles or to the youth in the streets?

It may be necessary to divide the youth into different age groups, for the younger ones would not be ready for intensive teaching on questions of marriage. The young men and women should also be divided when teaching certain topics.

With prepared teaching materials and trained teachers the youth groups and camps are ready made instruments for preparing youth for marriage.

4.2.2.4 Scripture Union

The advantage of Youth Camps is their intensive nature – youth being together for one week of continual instruction and interaction for twenty-four hour days. The advantage of weekly youth meetings in church is that they provide opportunities for teaching, questions and discussion over many months and years.

With written materials for teaching the youth in every aspect of preparation for marriage, the youth would be well prepared for marriage. It would also be valuable for mature, committed and trained husband and wife to lead them into a knowledge of these things as teachers, counsellors, friends and role models.

4.2.2.5 **Pre-Marital Counselling**

No couple should be married before they are counselled on several occasions. The purpose is not to teach them everything there is to know about sex, marital relations, relations with parents and in-laws and so on. But counselling should introduce all these issues and guide the couple into knowing where and how they might find help in these areas. During the counselling helpful books may be loaned to them for reading.

Pre-marital counselling is often not valued by couples because they have never experienced the benefits of counselling. Therefore, they do not seek out a counsellor. Sometimes pastors feel they are busy with too many weddings and do not have the time to counsel a couple before marriage. Therefore many couples marry without receiving marital counselling.

The key to successful counselling is a wise, capable and committed pastor with adequate training. This does not mean that the pastor will do all the counselling. He should arrange to counsel those whom he marries, but he may arrange for others to assist as well. Traditionally, grandfathers, uncles and older men counselled the younger men on sensitive issues like sex, while the grandmothers, aunts and older women counselled the younger women. A bride is often uncomfortable when being counselled with her bridegroom by a pastor. She is freer to ask questions and enter into discussion if she is with another woman alone. A wise pastor will understand this and arrange for the couple together and individually to receive the kind of counselling they need.

4.2.3 CONCLUSION

Churches have the means whereby they can prepare the youth for Christian marriage. Parents need to be taught and advised as to how they might guide and teach their children. Youth Camps and Scripture Union are natural opportunities to teach youth. Pastors and elders in the churches need to counsel the youth prior to marriage.

What is needed most, however, are two things. Materials to use in teaching youth about Christian marriage and family; and committed, trained pastors with a vision and desire to counsel and teach their young people prior to marriage. Without these, the youth will continue to lack adequate preparation for marriage.

4.3 CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF CHOOSING A SPOUSE

Contemporary practices of selecting a spouse or partner for marriage are quite different from traditional ones, though the parents still have a prominent role in preparing children for marriage. Because of urbanisation and the mobility of people, schooling and modern education and increasing westernization the traditional patterns of arranging a marriage are disappearing. Instead, we may speak of young people in cities courting and dating in preparation for choosing their life partner.

4.3.1 Places Where Young Men and Women Meet

Instead of meeting in traditional dances, the youth today meet in churches, schools, towns, youth clubs, discos and other similar places.

In many churches youth groups have replaced the traditional age groups. Youth sing together in church and have other activities together where they can meet and become acquainted.

4.3.2 Lack of Parental Control

Travel and the way of life today have decreased the influence of parents in the arranging of marriages. Parental control over marriages is therefore disintegrating. Families are falling apart.

4.3.3 Increase in Immorality

Immorality before marriage is increasing dramatically. There is no peer pressure against immorality as in the past. Youth are no longer accountable to their age group. And once the marriage takes place, they all too often end in divorce. Unfaithfulness of the husband or wife contributes towards this breakdown in marriages.

4.3.4 Influence of Urbanization

Urbanization has brought many changes. Urbanization brings independence of the youth, separation of the youth from their parents, loss of parental control, preoccupation of parents with work and the general breakdown of the family unit.

Mixing of cultures with intertribal marriages creates problems, for the couple does not know what their culture is. This problem is not great if the tribes understand each other. But the court of law is helpless. If the couple is from the same tribe, then customary law prevails. But if the marriage is intertribal, then the government is at a loss.

As young people gain employment in the cities and become financially independent from their parents, the youth choose whom they want to marry, often without the parents even knowing their future daughter-in-law or son-in-law.

4.4 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHOOSING A SPOUSE

1. Christian Young People Must Know and Believe that God has a Good and Perfect Will for their Lives.

Part of God's careful planning for his children is possible marriage or the single state. "A man can inherit a house and money from his parents, but only the Lord can give him a sensible wife" (Proverbs 19:14). God has a perfect plan for every child of God which includes either a wife or husband or being single, all for the glory of God.

2. For Anyone to Know God's Will he or she Must be Rightly Related to God Through the New Birth.

God will only guide his children. So if a young person wants to know God's plan for his or her life he or she must first know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Romans 3:23; 5:12; 6:23; John 1:29; 3:16-18; Acts 4:12).

3. Not Only Must Christian Youth be Truly Saved, they Must Also Surrender their Lives to God to Do His Will Daily.

Many Christians simply do not surrender themselves and their future to God.

But how can God direct someone if that person is unwilling to do God's will? To be a Christian is by definition to confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (Romans 10:9,10). Further, God will only reveal His will to those who truly desire to do God's will. "Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know ..." (John 7:17).

But many Christians do not fully understand this. No Christian can take the following attitude, "Let God show me His will, and I will carefully consider whether I will follow God's will or not." No person with this

attitude can hope that God will speak to him. God will not reveal His will to anyone until he is ready to obey. A Christian must daily surrender his life to the Lord, asking Him and trusting Him to guide him.

4. Christian Youth should Remember that God has a Perfect Plan for their Whole Lives, not Just for Marriage.

A spouse is just part of God's possible future plan for a Christian. A future husband or wife will join their spouse in helping to fulfil God's perfect plan. A future wife will become a "suitable helper." A future husband will be the head of the home and a proper father to the children. Each Christian needs to seek a husband or wife who is compatible with them, who has similar interests and concerns. Marriage should only be with someone who has mutual interests and mutual concerns.

Christian youth should be able to talk over their dreams and hopes for the future, the kind of life work into which they believe God is directing them. Will this young woman be able to become a partner with her husband, sharing his dreams and helping him in his problems? Will this young man be sympathetic to the vocation which the young woman believes is God's will for her life?

Does the young couple share a mutuality, a common pool of interests that will help them keep together? This should be a major concern for each young person when thinking and praying about a spouse.

5. Throughout the Whole Process the Youth Must Pray in Faith, Believing that God Will Reveal His Will for Their Lives.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do and he will show you the right way" (Proverbs 3:5,6). "You are my God; teach me to do your will" (Psalm 143:10). "Don't be fools, then, but try to find out what the Lord wants you to do" (Ephesians 5:17). "...stand firm, as mature and

fully convinced Christians, in complete obedience to God's will" (Colossians 4:12).

There is need for young people to pray that God will lead them to the right mate. Prayer is talking with God, asking God to reveal His will and submitting their will to his. Prayer is the foundation of all marriage. Young people need to be encouraged to tell God how they feel, whether they are discouraged or disappointed. They should talk to God about the kind of wife or husband they want. But in all things they must let God rule and mould their wills to be conformed to His will.

The Bible teaches us the value of persevering, persistent prayer (Luke 11:5-13). If God does not answer your prayer immediately, a Christian should not give up or cease praying. "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Always remember God's promises. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this" (Psalm 37:4,5).

6. Not Only Should a Christian Pray to Know God's Will, He Should Also Know God's Will According to the Scriptures

The more a Christian is familiar with the Bible and understands God's Word, the more he or she will be able to discern God's plan and purpose for his or her life (Psalm 119:105). For God speaks to people by His Spirit through the Scriptures. There is no need to ask God's special guidance in matters that are clearly revealed in the Bible. If one knows the Bible, many basic truths and principles will be clearly understood.

For example, the Bible reveals what kind of qualities are most desirable for future spouse. Outward beauty is not the primary consideration for a Christian wife. "Your beauty...should be that of your

inner self, the unfading beauty of gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3,4). Thus a knowledge of God's Word enables an obedient Christian to discern the kind of person that might be a good spouse for him or her.

7. God has Planned that His Children only Marry Fellow Believers, those Truly Saved by the Blood of Jesus Christ.

If you know the teaching of the Word of God, you will know that a Christian should not pray concerning possible marriage to a young man or woman if that person does not love the Lord with all his or her heart. The Bible clearly reveals that an unsaved person is not God's will for a Christian's future spouse (II Corinthians 6:14). If a person continues to be interested in someone who does not know and love the Lord Jesus and show by his life that he or she is born again, that person is living in disobedience to God and does not really desire to know and do God's will.

However, the question arises, "Who is a Christian?" Many people attend church but are not saved. Many people have been baptised, sing in the choir and attend youth camps but are not born again. Moreover, many young men want Christian wives since they seem to be of a better quality than non-Christians. Therefore, they pretend to be Christians and participate in church activities, in order to attract some Christian lady from the church. Sometimes a problem arises when there are far more committed Christian young women in a church than committed Christian young men.

The happiest and brightest future is for those who trust and obey God and do what pleases the Lord. The young woman who marries an educated, wealthy young man with the hope that she will convert him or change him after they are married, will live a long life of regret and sorrow that she did not follow God's will.

Sometimes youth claim to have dreams or visions that reveal who they

should marry. But such dreams cannot be trusted. If a person is not a firm, committed believer in Jesus Christ, he or she is not God's will for a Christian's life, no matter what dreams or visions may say. The revealed, written Word of God must be trusted and obeyed above all else.

The Bible is clear! The people of God should only marry those who know and love the Lord. Any other decision will lead to God's displeasure and unhappiness throughout a person's married life.

8. Christian Youth need an Active Faith in Seeking God's Will for Marriage.

Not only should Christian youth know the Lord Jesus, trust in Him, pray and read His Word and surrender their wills to do His will, they need to exercise active faith. Sitting down, waiting for and expecting the Lord to bring a future husband or wife is not enough.

Christian youth need to make friends among those who love the Lord. They need to make friends with God's children of their own age at church, youth camps and church sponsored activities. They need to plan to attend youth camps, retreats and participate in other activities in order to meet Christian young people.

This means that the churches, pastors, elders and leading women in the churches need to organise healthy get-togethers. Youth who love the Lord need to build up one another through wholesome association and this is best sponsored by the local churches. "Healthy get-togethers" should involve supervised interaction among the youth: For instance, mature Christians should attend and supervise youth retreats, not just the youth themselves.

However, Christian youth should always remember that not all young people in the choir, youth services or church circles are truly saved or

truly committed to Jesus Christ. Not all of them will make a good husband or wife. Just because someone is an active, faithful choir member does not mean he will be a Christian husband. It is dangerous to assume that any person in Christian circles will qualify as a Christian spouse. A Christian may suffer for the rest of his life from such a decision.

Of course, it would be wrong to attend church activities with the primary goal of looking for a husband or wife. Some people do this but it is unhealthy. A Christian should participate in the choir and youth activities because he or she loves the Lord, because he loves to be with others who also love the Lord.

But from these opportunities of getting acquainted, Christian youth will make many friends. Some young men make marriage proposals to a young woman very quickly without having many acquaintances among other young women. Sometimes the young man or woman becomes emotionally attached and they close themselves off from other friends. This is unhealthy.

A mature, wise decision about who to marry is often based on a broad number of acquaintances from committed, saved youth. Quick marriage proposals are unwise and often lead to trouble.

9. Christian Youth Need to Seek Counsel and Advice from their Parents and from Older, Mature Christians.

This is biblical. "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" (Proverbs 1:5). "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning" (Proverbs 9:9). "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory" (Proverbs 11:14). "The way of a fool seem right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" (Proverbs 12:15). "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22).

"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise" (Proverbs 19:20). Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance" (Proverbs 20:18). "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel" (Proverbs 27:9).

Parental advice is very important. Parents should be the first to counsel and advise their children about marriage. Youth should value the advice and recommendations of those who have more experience and who are mature in their Christian faith.

10. Youth Should Relate to the Members of the Opposite Sex in a Culturally Acceptable Manner, which Honours God Before Other People.

The Bible teaches Christians not to offend others by their behaviour (1 Corinthians 8:13; 10:32,33). Even if one's own conscience is clear that he is not sinning against God, he needs to be careful of the impression he gives to others. If personal conduct raises questions or suspicions in the minds of others, Christians must avoid it. Whatever a Christian does should be for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and not merely to please himself.

Here is an example of a possible problem. When and how should the youth fellowship together? There is a change these days from traditional customs to present day practices among the youth. Is it good to relate to the opposite sex in a manner which raises suspicions, which causes offence to the older people and which may create a bad reputation?

Suppose a handsome young man does not think he will be tempted when he is alone with a beautiful young woman. Do they not also have a responsibility to give a good example to others, lest others fall into temptation from their example? Do they not need to protect their

testimony before others? Should they not guard themselves against temptation?

Should a young man and woman walk together or spend time together without the company of other friends? Times are changing. Some young people do. But questions are raised in the minds of older people about the conduct or intention of those two youth. It is best not only to think of some immediate need of getting acquainted but of the need to keep a good testimony and reputation before others.

Christian youth also need to face the danger of temptation to sin. When a young man and young woman are together alone they may begin well. Their thoughts and desires may be above reproach in the beginning. But when they are alone time after time they may be tempted to mess around. They may begin to plan marriage quickly and others wonder what the reason is for the rush. Therefore, a young man is unwise to take a young woman away to do something together, for this assumes commitment already and raises suspicions and temptations.

And yet African traditions are relaxing, especially in the cities. In a sense this is good, but there should be supervision and control. We should not let a young man and woman be alone in a house together.

Some Christian families encourage their children to bring any friend of the opposite sex to their home where they provide an opportunity to do things and talk together. In the city this solves the problem of where to meet and talk. In the rural area one can easily meet under a tree.

It is good when a Christian family can welcome a friend of their daughter or son to meet together in their own house while the parents are around. The two can discuss, come to understand each other, pray together and discover what God's will is for their lives. They can do this in a healthy environment, without temptation and without ruining their

reputation, because they truly do not understand one another.

There needs to be balance. Twenty or thirty years ago a young man and lady could not sit together to study. This is an extreme. The other extreme is unrestrained freedom to be together alone in someone's house. The youth need supervision and control.

11. Youth should be Careful to Distinguish Between True Love and Infatuation.

True love endures but infatuation is a passing experience. The key is to wait. It requires time to test what kind of love someone is experiencing. Sometimes true love grows out of infatuation, but not necessarily.

12. Making the final choice.

Magic is ever so simple. Guidance through mystical powers of magic are straightforward, cut and dried. But Christian guidance, by the Spirit of God and through His Word, is not that simple. God desires us to wait upon Him for guidance and direction.

How then can one know God's choice for his or her spouse? Through a combination of inner testimony of your own spirit, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the confirmation of counsellors (friends and family), the support of the Scriptures, and the happy arrangement of the circumstances. And all of this should be tested over time.

Eliezer, Abraham's servant, was sent to search for a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). How was Eliezer to find her?

There were certain clear directions. He was not to find her among the Canaanites for they were unbelievers. Eliezer was directed to find her from his own relatives in the "old country" (Ur of the Chaldees).

But which girl should she be? Eliezer had to take a step of faith, in fact, a long journey. During his journey he prayed and asked God to show him clearly (Genesis 24:12-14). As he took the sequence of logical steps (obeying his master, Abraham; going to the right place to find a bride; praying) –“being in the way” the Lord led him.

What may seem like a difficult problem to solve is supernaturally solved as you take one step at a time, trusting the Lord and doing what is proper according to His revealed will.

4.5 **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ROMANTIC INFATUATION AND TRUE LOVE**

1. Romantic infatuation may happen suddenly and without warning, whereas true love grows and all growth takes time.
2. Romantic infatuation arises from knowing only one or two characteristics of the person (such as her beauty or intelligence or grace), whereas true love grows out of an appreciation for the whole personality.

Ask whether she will be the kind of mother I want for my children. Ask whether he is the kind of person I want my friends to know well and enjoy with me. Ask whether she is the kind of person I want to love if poor health were to take away her beauty and vitality? A person in love should be willing to ask such questions.

3. Romantic infatuation is self-centred and looks at the other person as a means to an end. True love is other-centred, outgoing, self-giving.

Because of the problems of infatuation, “falling in love” is not always a safe sign of truly being in love. You may fall in love during some youth camp and find that the feeling disappears after a few months. Or you may feel madly in love but come to realise later that the person is

unsuitable. It takes patience and thought to evaluate your feelings of "falling in love" and it requires self-control not to act too hastily and quickly.

Marriage cannot be built on the emotions and thrill of "being in love." The non-Christian who bases marriage on "falling in love" will easily find a reason to divorce. But the Christian is bound by his commitment to his marriage vows. True love grows through cultivation and commitment to one another, whereas infatuation and romantic love diminishes.

4.6 MAINTAINING PURITY BEFORE AND DURING MARRIAGE

4.6.1 Biblical Principles on Purity

Purity is one of the prerequisites for a Christian marriage according to the Scriptures. Even as the Church universal, the Bride of Christ, is to be presented to Christ "as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27), the bride should be pure when presented to her bridegroom in marriage. After the wedding ceremony takes place, the married couple are bound by their vows before God to be faithful to each other.

4.6.1.1 Immorality in Deed (Adultery and Fornication) Results in God's Judgement

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: NO immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:3-5; compare Colossians 3:5ff).

4.6.1.2

Impure Thoughts Are Just as Sinful

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27ff; compare Philippians 4:8).

4.6.1.3

Places and Occasions of Temptation to be Avoided

Christians should avoid those places and occasions where one is tempted with unclean thoughts or actions. Though Christians may claim the right to watch movies or dance in the name of "Christian freedom", a mature Christian will avoid all occasions of temptation. "For you, brethren, were called to freedom; only do not let your freedom be an incentive to your flesh and an opportunity or excuse for selfishness." (Galatians 5:13 compare Proverbs 4:14-16).

4.6.1.4

The Results of Sin are Serious

First, sin leads to broken fellowship with God. When a Christian sins, he transgresses God's law and offends God. This leads to divine judgement.

Second, she will experience disgrace before others. Her reputation will be ruined. It is twice as hard to improve a bad reputation than to maintain a good reputation. Losing a reputation of noble character will deeply affect anyone in his or her future service for God.

Third, he will have a guilty conscience. He will be aware, both night and day, that he has sinned against God. This will become a burden and be painful until the person seeks God's forgiveness.

Fourth, one possible and lasting consequence of sin is a child born outside of marriage. This involves financial responsibility and the pain and agony of dealing with the consequences of sin. Even if immorality does not lead to a child being born, there will be the loss of moral purity, loss of virginity –

something that can never be reclaimed.

4.6.1.5 The Need to Approach This Issue with Total Commitment to God

Christian youth need to be as determined as an athlete who trains and runs to win a race. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

4.6.2 Traditional Church Belief and Practice in Africa

This high standard of purity before marriage has been the unanimous conviction among Christians. When I interviewed Christians to find out what they believed were the "essential elements" in any wedding in order for it to be called a "Christian wedding," they responded that those who were being married should be pure, without prior sexual union. Purity before marriage was agreed to be the most important feature of a Christian wedding.

Even as virginity was a traditional virtue among many African communities in the past, so purity has been a strong conviction in the Christian churches in Africa from the beginning. In the tradition of some churches, still maintained by older pastors, the white wedding dress and veil were to be worn only by those first married in the church. Any renewal of a wedding in the church would not include the white wedding dress and veil. Those married in the church office or in the rear of the church because of disciplinary reasons would not wear the white dress and veil.

In traditional Africa, purity before marriage was very important among many peoples, though not among all of them. Virginity was a glory to the young lady, to her mother, village and clan. Years ago people would ask if a girl was a virgin. This was considered important before marriage.

But today young men do not care. Somewhere, somehow concern for purity before marriage has disappeared. Many parents are not concerned, not even the pastors. The cultural way has been overturned but the church is doing little to deal with this problem. In the past young men were taught by Church leaders. But today immorality is accepted as a way of life.

Even in churches there are find few weddings where the brides are still virgins. Many of the church traditions related to purity before marriage are changing with compromise. The white dress and veil are worn by everyone, whether in the church office or in the rear of the church. More and more people are being married in church, and the bride always wears a white gown, even when she is already pregnant.

- In few church weddings are the brides still virgins. Pastors are not concerned nor are the parents. They accept this as the way of life today. In old times people talked about the problem if the girl was not a virgin. The mother was concerned. But today, few people are concerned because they think it is common.

4.6.3 The Biblical Solution to the Problem of Impurity:

The problem is that no one is concerned about teaching the young people. The cultural way has been done away with, but the church has not replaced the traditional values with strong Christian morals. Young men were traditionally taught by older men. Young girls used to sleep with their aunts or grandmothers who taught them.

It is most important that the meaning of the white dress and veil is continued to be taught. The meaning of the white dress is purity. To allow those married in sin to wear white is a real problem. It is important to show people that they must repent of their relationships prior to marriage. Discipline is necessary. To marry pregnant brides in church is wrong.

4.6.3.1 **The Youth Must First be Saved**

The youth need first to be saved, to know the Lord personally. Too many baptised youth are not saved. We cannot expect non-Christians to maintain a standard of Christian morality.

4.6.3.2. **A Christian Environment Should Be Provided for Fellowship**

A positive atmosphere must also be provided for young men and ladies to meet together and interact socially. Churches should provide activities and programmes for their youth during school holidays. Christian churches should also promote Christian youth clubs. Churches don't seem to concentrate on the youth, assuming that regional or district level youth camps are adequate.

But the question is raised, how can Youth Groups be active and effective in preserving purity? Even where Youth Groups have thrived, purity is lacking. Girls let the boys touch their breasts. The girls should be taught instead to scream. One problem is that different mothers or teachers teach different standards and the girls listen to the easier teachers.

Parents need to take time with their children. In fact the problem is greater than the need to teach the youth. We need to reach the parents. Parents often feel unable to teach the youth and respond to their young people by saying, "Get away, don't ask such silly questions." There is a difference between preaching and teaching. The youth need the opportunity to ask questions so they can be taught. Currently this is lacking. Besides teaching, purity must begin at home. Girls must have model parents who are good examples, together with teaching in the home.

The primary responsibility of training children in purity belongs with the parents. Yet the children are home so seldom. The children are on the way to school by 6:00 a.m., return home in the afternoon, perhaps 3:00 p.m. and then return to their school later for study. Parents have little time to be with their children. However, parents cannot give their responsibility of teaching their

children over to the teachers. "Charity begins at home." Morals also begin at home.

4.6.3.3 Christian Teaching Should Be Given to the Youth by Churches

Although God has given the parents the chief responsibility in teaching and caring for their own children, the church also has a central role to play. A great effort should be made by the churches to provide teaching at every level with relevant materials prepared for them here in Africa. Because immorality is such a widespread problem, the church needs to teach high moral standards and provide an atmosphere where purity is encouraged and honoured.

4.6.3.4 Churches Should Arrange for Older People to Counsel the Youth

Churches should encourage grandmothers and uncles to teach the youth. Parents find it difficult to talk about some issues with their children. These topics can be taught by other relatives, including aunts, uncles and grandparents.

4.7 ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONSENT

4.7.1 Contemporary Christian Practice

4.7.1.1 Customary Engagement Patterns Followed

Engagement patterns today among Christians are essentially the same as the traditional ones with some modifications. Community patterns should not be ignored by Christians. Where culture does not contradict the Scripture Christians should exercise their freedom to uphold such practices. This attitude helps the Christian Church in her relationship with parents especially when difficult issues are involved. Unnecessary conflicts should not be created. Parents are, at the same time, advised not to put too much pressure

on their sons and daughters. Whether it is in the urban or rural area Christians must always seek the approval of their parents.

4.7.1.2 **Modifications of Customary Engagement Patterns**

Some of the modifications of traditional engagement may include:

1. Rings are worn today instead of an armband.
2. Beer is absent during family discussions.
3. Money is exchanged today (this was not possible years ago).
4. Couples make more decisions about the marriage. Traditionally, parents made all the arrangements; the couple being married had no say. But today the couple does have a say. There is greater openness today for ideas or suggestions.
5. Modern engagements take longer than traditional ones. There was little waiting before marriage after the engagement in the past.

4.7.2 **Biblical Principles Applied to Engagement**

4.7.2.1 **Eloping is Not Christian**

Eloping is against many African customs. It is very essential for a Christian to follow normal engagement patterns. Parents have a legal and moral right to agree or disagree to a marriage. Many parents are not Christians and will not always agree with the choices their Christian children make.

The case of Rebecca and Isaac is a Biblical example of marriage followed by the betrothal. The servant of Abraham made an agreement with Rebecca's parents for Rebecca to marry Isaac (Genesis 24). Jacob talked with the prospective father-in-law, Laban, and made arrangements for his engagement

and the payment of bride price before marriage (Genesis 29:15-24).

Christians tend to forget the power of prayer when they are involved in something they want urgently. Prayer should not be forgotten when it comes to marriage. If parents are opposed to the marriage, time should be taken in prayer. The Christian community must take these issues very seriously because God is the Provider of a life partner. He should be central and carnality and lust should not dominate our desire to get married.

4.7.2.2 Choosing the Best is Important

The desire of the Christian should not just be to get married, but to get married to the best person. Christian maturity should play a major role in our choice of a mate. We all know that after a certain age a person has legal right to marry contrary to their parents' wishes. However, a Christian should not only be guided by legal rights. We have a Higher Power. We appeal to God for all aspects of our life. The freedom of legal right must not be exercised in ignorance of God's will.

Paul reminds the Corinthian believers, "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:1,2). The Corinthian believers had the lawful right before God to eat meat offered to idols if their conscience did not bother them. However, Paul taught that love for their fellow believers and concern to build up wholesome Christian relationships was more important than the exercise of personal rights. "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (9:19).

4.7.2.3 Obeying parents "in the Lord" is Biblical

What if parents are not Christian and they refuse certain requests or desire something unacceptable to the Christian, such as alcohol? The Bible says, "obey in the Lord" (Eph.6:1). The Bible also teaches, "Fathers, do not

exasperate your children" (Eph. 6:4). If the misuse of alcohol is demanded, then Christians are not required to obey their parents.

I have observed that parents do listen to their children if they are approached with respect. There have been many cases where parents agreed not to have alcohol at weddings because of their Christian children. The big problem with alcohol is the misuse of it at weddings. Where Christians are confronted with a situation in which they know that misuse will take place, no alcohol should be purchased. Different contexts and situations will have to guide our decision in this regard. The standard of Christian life the Christian maintains plays a great role in the decision of the parents. If a Christian does not keep to some basic Christian principles it will be difficult for parents to take him or her seriously on issues such as alcohol. There should be high Christian ethical standards and these will also serve as a safeguard for negotiations with parents.

4.7.2.4 Parental Understanding is Equally Important

Both the parents and the young people must be balanced in their approach. For the young people it must only be in extreme cases that they are married without parental consent. Obedience to parents does not only relate to Christian parents, but all parents. Parents must also know that children can become bitter towards their parents. Maintenance of a healthy relationship must come from both sides. Parents sometimes have to be taught to understand their sons and daughters. Young people must learn the value of being patient with and obedient to the wishes of their parents. On the other hand, parents must be very careful.

Young people must not start talking about how they want the marriage to be only a few weeks or months before they want to get married. The parents should know all the likes and dislikes far in advance. It prepares them better if they hear and think about it for a long time. Rushing to try to correct things three weeks before the marriage actually creates more tension.

4.7.2.5 **Prayer and Counselling with the Pastor is Essential**

Under normal circumstances no marriage should take place without pre-marital counselling. In some Churches fellowships have been started where prospective couples come together. During this fellowship many issues relating to marriage are discussed. The pastor should play a major role in pre-marital counselling by personal involvement and the provision of relevant literature to the couple. Before any engagement takes place the pastor must be informed so that he can also give advice on whether the two should go ahead or not.

4.8 **PAYMENT OF OVITUNJA**

A lot has already been said about the importance of *ovitunja*. The changes that have taken place in this practice will be examined.

4.8.1 **Changes in Ovitunja**

4.8.1.1 **Money Has Replaced Cattle For Ovitunja**

Ovitunja is no longer paid in goats, sheep and cattle only, but with money too. The question arises, therefore, how much to pay. There used to be a standard price of *ovitunja* set differently in different areas. Not today. Payment in money has changed the issue. In one case the *ovitunja* was set at five sheep, 2 cows and three thousand Namibian dollars.

4.8.1.2 **Education Raises the Cost of the Ovitunja**

If a girl is highly educated, she costs more. Traditionally, the woman was an asset. She could help with her work. Today, the more education she has, the greater will be her wealth.

4.8.1.3 **Ovitunja is Paid to the Person who Contributes Most to the Ceremony**

Today the *ovitunja* is given only to the person who has contributed the most towards the wedding ceremony. In the past, the *ovitunja* was shared with other family members.

4.8.1.4 **The Suitor, Not His Family, Pays the Ovitunja**

In the past the father or uncle or other members of the family paid the *ovitunja*, but today the man himself pays the *ovitunja*. In the past helping the young man to marry was a communal affair, though they only helped with the first wife. All other wives were the man's responsibility. Now the responsibility of paying the *ovitunja* rests entirely upon the man getting married.

In the past the family chose the girl, but today the young man chooses his bride. So this creates a difference in how the *ovitunja* is obtained, for the responsibility of paying *ovitunja* rests on the young man.

4.8.1.5 **The Roles of the Father and Son Have Changed**

In the past, the father owned the animals to help his son marry a woman. But now young men are financially independent and, therefore, have more authority over whom they will marry. The son actually supports the father. The father does not have money to pay for the *ovitunja* (contrasted with the past when the father had the necessary animals). So the burden is on the son. Many times the father uses part of the *ovitunja* he receives in order to contribute generously toward the wedding expenses. Even the bride sometimes helps her groom pay for the *ovitunja*, if she is working and agrees to do it.

4.8.1.6 **Greed Makes *Ovitunja* Very Expensive**

Greed leads to extortionate *ovitunja* today. One dare not say in the presence of the bride's parents that they are greedy. But in fact, many times they are greedy. A lot of emphasis today is put on the amount of money to ask. Among the Herero of Namibia the ox has been replaced by money due to the scarcity of oxen today. But the amount of money asked is so high that many young people cannot afford it.

We have already given the reasons for the *ovitunja* in chapter 3 thus we will not repeat them here. A high bride price effects the relationship between son- and father-in-law. The father-in-law sometimes asks the son-in-law for financial assistance and many times the high bride price affects his decision.

4.8.2 **Biblical Principles Applied to *Ovitunja***

4.8.2.1 ***Ovitunja* is Sanctioned by Scripture**

The fact that Scripture nowhere condemns payment of *ovitunja* but instead contains examples of God's people exchanging *ovitunja* for marriage, demonstrates that God's Word does not condemn *ovitunja* but implicitly supports its legitimacy.

Compare the examples of Isaac (Genesis 24:50-54), Jacob (Genesis 29:16-20) and David (1 Samuel 18:17-27). *Ovitunja* seemed to be paid according to the man's ability. Abraham, a wealthy man, gave out of his wealth, while Jacob in his material poverty gave his labour.

4.8.2.2 **The Bible Values Different Cultures**

I refer again to the section on culture. In the Bible we do not see any condemnation of the practice among the Hebrew people. It is impossible to condemn *ovitunja* on the basis of Scripture. We can Scripturally only condemn the misuse of it.

4.8.2.3 **Ovitunja is Optional For Christian Weddings, Not a Requirement**

In the Bible there are only stories of *ovitunja*, but no teaching that *ovitunja* should be paid. Ovitunja is not really essential for a Christian marriage in Africa today. In fact, African cultures are changing and some families do not demand *ovitunja* for their daughters to be married. Many times the bridegroom may give gifts to his bride's parents to show his appreciation but, technically speaking, this is not *ovitunja*. The payment of *ovitunja* was traditionally an essential part of every legitimate marriage but with the passing of time and changing of customs, *ovitunja* should not be considered essential for every Christian marriage today. *Ovitunja* should be optional for each family.

4.8.2.4 **Greed must be Avoided**

Care must be taken to avoid the love of money and the danger of greed. It is easy for a legitimate exchange of gifts to degenerate into greed for money (Luke 12:15-21; Colossians 3:2,5,6; 1 John 2:15-17).

The Bible is not against *ovitunja* as such. However, when *ovitunja* becomes too expensive then it is wrong. In the past even the poorest could get married because *ovitunja* could be paid after marriage as well. It is wrong if people cannot get married because of a very high bride price. The custom has been so much commercialised that many parents demand money before they give their daughters into marriage. This attitude should be changed.

4.8.2.5 **Parents Should Value Christian Character More Than Material Things**

Though *ovitunja* has been universally practised throughout Africa, Christian parents need to evaluate the reasons why they demand *ovitunja*. Greater value should be placed on the quality of the young man, both his Christian character, life and vocation more than on the payment of *ovitunja*. Christian

parents may decide not to request *ovitunja* from a young man whom they love, respect and trust, rather than create a great hardship for him. *Ovitunja* should be paid according to one's ability.

The Christian Church should counsel and advise parents on the importance of their daughters marrying fine, Christian young men. *Ovitunja* should only be required according to the ability of the person to pay. Otherwise *ovitunja* degenerates into a commercial transaction, something very different from the traditional concept of *ovitunja*.

4.8.2.6 Christian Parents Should Control the Negotiations of *Ovitunja*

Christian parents have a great part to play when negotiating for the *ovitunja*. For them to leave the negotiations of *ovitunja* with some unsaved relative is foolish. Parents can choose which person will negotiate *ovitunja*. The person chosen can be counselled as to what the parents wish. The man chosen by the parents cannot go beyond the wishes of the parents.

When non-Christian relatives join in the discussion, they often create problems. Christian parents and Christian relatives should not bring in a non-Christian relative for negotiating *ovitunja*.

The father has a major role to play. He calls the family together. He invites the family to the wedding. He sets the date. They can forbid beer at the wedding, if he desires. Therefore, relatives should not be allowed to take the upper hand. Authority goes with age. Christian parents can also invite church elders to talk about *ovitunja* in order to prevent *ovitunja* from becoming a burden.

4.8.2.7 The Church Should Teach Their Members

The Church is responsible to educate Christians in general and parents in particular not to require excessive *ovitunja*. The Church must also teach

people from the pulpit not to allow non-Christians to chair the *ovitunja* committee and go contrary to the wishes of the Christian parents. The Christian parents should have the primary voice. If the unsaved chairman of the committee to discuss the *ovitunja* makes certain recommendations, others often fear to contradict him.

Genesis 24 seems to provide a basic principle for us. Something is given to show appreciation to the guardians of Rachel, but nothing was demanded. Without being asked for a gift, the servant volunteered to give gifts. After agreement was reached, the girl was given the opportunity to decide whether to wait or to go immediately for marriage.

The problem today is that the young man's parents do not always appreciate the young woman's parents. Or her parents are greedy for school fees. The young man needs to give what he has, not what he does not have. Falling into debt before marriage is a very poor practice. The Church has an important role to play in teaching Christians to have biblical priorities. Nothing should be done to overrule the wishes of the parents. Christian parents should request Christians to chair and lead the discussion.

4.8.2.8 **Pastors Should Counsel and Advise Christian Parents**

Before the time of discussing *ovitunja*, the parents need to be counselled by the pastors in their homes. Although negotiations for *ovitunja* include other members of the family, Christian parents can set the standard. Christian families need to understand the importance of Christian weddings and the problems that high *ovitunja* can bring to young people wanting to marry.

Teaching from the pulpit and pastoral counselling in the homes of parents are both needed so that Christians will understand that "*Ovitunja* is not selling". Counselling is also needed for the young men so they understand the purpose of *ovitunja*: *Ovitunja* is for the purpose of talking and having mutual understanding and commitment.

If pastoral counselling is neglected, parents will simply follow traditional customs. Pastors must try to offer possible solutions to problems related to *ovitunja*.

4.8.2.9 **Having a Christian Wedding is Most Important**

The Church should teach the importance of having a Christian wedding above everything else. When Christian parents refuse to give consent to their daughter to have a Christian wedding before a large payment of *ovitunja* is given, this frustrates the Christian couple, tempts them to sin and destroys the real purpose of *ovitunja*.

In many cases, however, high *ovitunja* is not the major problem preventing Christian weddings. It is lack of Christian commitment. Young men need to be taught how to choose and court a woman for marriage. The problem is that many young men keep two, three or even four girl friends. Because the girl fears being dropped by him, she quickly decides to live with him. But as the saying goes, "the cheaper you come, the cheaper you go". There is a lack of commitment in such relationships. Young couples need to be taught the importance of placing Christ first in their lives and committing their marriage to the Lord through a Christian wedding.

Ovitunja does not need to be completed before marriage. A Christian wedding should be encouraged by the Christian parents before all the *ovitunja* is paid. *Ovitunja* payments may continue after the marriage ceremony has taken place.

Young people intending to marry need to be counselled about talking to their parents. They should not be afraid. If a young couple really desires a Christian wedding they should spend time with their respective parents and this takes patience and courage.

4.8.2.10 **Wrong Understandings of *Ovitunja* Should be Corrected**

We need to correct the understanding of young people concerning *ovitunja*. They fear and have a bad feeling towards *ovitunja*. This spoils everything. "Do you want to be bought?" the young man says to his girl friend. "A good speech can persuade parents in the wedding". The young man should find a good spokesman. If the youth fear *ovitunja*, they should understand that it is not cheap to keep a wife either.

But we should also teach young men not to give too little *ovitunja* which is an insult; nor too much so that they fall into debt. Loans are taken for the reception or the *ovitunja*. This is not good.

As Christians we should accept others as they are. We ought not to set guidelines of how much to pay, for this may be too much for some and too little for others. We should ask according to the young man's ability to pay.

Parents should understand that it is not necessary to do exactly what others do. Most parents like uniformity. They like to do what other parents do. In traditional culture there was uniformity. They knew how many sheep and cattle to pay.

Christians have the ability to correct the abuse of *ovitunja* if they so desire. We should stress the relationship between the parents and the son-in-law and not stress *ovitunja*.

If we can bring down the cost of weddings, we can also bring down the cost of *ovitunja*. If Christian weddings remain expensive, then *ovitunja* will remain expensive.

4.9 THE WEDDING CEREMONY

4.9.1 Elements in a Traditional Christian Wedding Ceremony in Africa

Traditionally, the most important part of the process of becoming married in Africa was the engagement made in the presence of the extended families. This was followed by the payment of the *ovitunja* by the bridegroom's parents. The actual wedding ceremony itself was not prominent or public in nature. It differed greatly among the various communities and sometimes consisted of a small ritual conducted in the presence of a few family members.

In Christian weddings today in Africa, however, the wedding ceremony is the most public part of the marriage process. Sometimes the wedding is preceded by a pre-wedding party to help the bride and bridegroom finance their wedding. The wedding ceremony itself includes:

1. the bride and bridegroom being recognized in church,
2. the exchange of the marriage vows,
3. a message from the Word of God followed by advice given to the couple and accompanied by prayers,
4. the signing of the marriage certificates,
5. the blessing of the couple and
6. the marriage feast with the giving of gifts to the bride and bridegroom.

4.9.2 Pre-Wedding Parties

Traditionally, the parents provided all that was necessary for the wedding. Today the marrying couple must pay for all the expenses. Since they must spend all they have on *ovitunja* and on the wedding, they need help from

friends. Many times the churches help the couple by agreeing to provide cooldrinks or meat for the feast. Yet even this becomes difficult because of the numerous weddings. Hence a pre-wedding party is a help, though this also becomes a burden on many people.

The church must avoid every tendency toward commercialism in Christian weddings. Pre-wedding parties can be prompted by the desire to receive as much money as possible. Some people have thousands of wedding invitation cards printed and give them out to any casual acquaintance, hoping to get more money. In fact, there is wisdom in not allowing pre-wedding parties to avoid all temptation of greed and commercialism.

4.9.3 **Wedding Ceremony**

In Christian circles the traditions surrounding the wedding ceremony have defined what a Christian marriage is. A Christian wedding today is one that is held in a church where the bride is dressed in a white wedding gown with a veil over her face and attended by beautifully dressed bridesmaids, the exchange of wedding rings and the signing of the marriage certificates followed by an elaborate marriage feast complete with a wedding cake.

Some of these wedding traditions originated in the West and were introduced into Africa by missionaries in the past. They have become accepted as essentials for any Christian wedding. In fact, some pastors are unhappy if a Christian wedding is not large, impressive and expensive in nature.

Though the white wedding gown and veil worn by the bride is an importation from the West, it has become a very traditional part of African Christian weddings. Any suggested changes may appear revolutionary. If one is married in the office of the Magistrate, ordinary dress is acceptable. But it is assumed that a bride must wear a white wedding gown and veil in a Church wedding.

Historically, white was a sign of purity. "The ancients carried out this belief by

making it a custom for brides to wear white as an emblem of their purity” (Eichler,1937:254). According to Lillian Eichler (1937), even before it denoted purity, white denoted joy. The early Romans apparently wore white on occasions of rejoicing, such as birth and feast days. The white rose was an emblem of joy among the Greeks. The ancient Patagonians also were in the habit of painting their bodies white on every joyous occasion. “The whole body was covered with white paint on the eve of the wedding ceremony” (Eichler, 1937:254).

The fact must be accepted that the white wedding gown does not validate a wedding. The absence thereof also does not devalue a marriage. It is a tradition which can be applied relatively. But where it is not applied clarification must precede the wedding to avoid misunderstandings. We have many people in our Churches today who will never be happy with a marriage where the bride does not wear a white gown. This aspect needs to be clarified in the Christian Church in Africa. Some Christians do not get married because they cannot afford the expensive wedding gown. The white wedding gown is so expensive that many people cannot afford it. Whether renting or buying, it is equally expensive, more than N\$ 2000 in some cases. People who cannot afford it must not feel guilty if they don't wear it.

4.9.4 Marriage Feasting

Feasting has always been an important part of African culture. Indeed, a marriage feast was customary in biblical times (Matthew 25:1-13; John 2:1-11; Revelation 19:9). Some would even say that a wedding feast is essential for a Christian marriage in Africa today, since such feasts were found in Africa in the past and during biblical times.

Since marriage is a community affair there must be a public get together, a public feast, even though this may be small and simple. During the wedding feast Christians show their love to the couple by giving them gifts to help them start their home. Traditionally, this was not done in most communities. But the minds of Africans today have been changed and the giving of gifts is

common.

4.9.5 Importance of a Christian Wedding in the Opinion of Many Christians

Many Christians believe that Christians ought to have their marriage blessed in the Church.

4.9.6 Confusion Surrounding the Christian Wedding

Even though most Christians feel that Christian weddings are important, there is great confusion as to what constitutes a Christian wedding. The non-essentials of a Christian Marriage tend to be confused with essentials. Time must be spent in the study of the biblical theology for marriage.

Churches need to teach their members the meaning of a Christian marriage so that the essentials of a Christian marriage are distinguished from the church traditions of a Christian wedding. Mixing church traditions with the gospel results in a great confusion. Worse than confusion, this emphasis on the externals of the marriage ceremony detracts from the value of Christian weddings.

4.10 HOW TO REDUCE THE COST OF CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS

1. *Teach on the True Meaning of a Christian Wedding*

Pastors must preach the truth that marriage is built on love, not money. Jesus gave Himself in love to his bride, the Church. He did not give money. What matters in a Christian wedding is the heart of the couple, not the colourful elements of the wedding ceremony. Pastors must teach that the life of a Christian couple in marriage is far more important than the day of the wedding ceremony itself.

2. *Preach on the Danger of Pride*

Pastors also need to teach on the sin of pride and the need for moderation in all things. All too often weddings today are for the purpose of showing off. There is a social status attached to weddings. The parents of the bride and bridegroom are shown special respect. There is dignity and prestige attached to a beautiful wedding with many gifts.

Pride forces Christians to have expensive weddings. Parents often want their daughter's or son's wedding to be the biggest and best. Expensive clothes at weddings can only draw attention to those wearing them. To marry expensively because of the pressure of society means that Christian weddings are occasions of pride.

Expensive weddings are due to pride in most cases, either the pride of the couple who want people to talk about their successful wedding, or the pride of the parents who want to be respected and honoured by the size and expense of the wedding, or the pastor and church who do not want to be shamed by a small wedding. "Greek teaching regarded pride as a virtue and humility as unacceptable. The Christian ethic consciously rejected Greek thought in favour of the biblical outlook" (Douglas, 1962:1027).

Thus men fear the expense of Christian weddings. And many Christian couples fall into debt in order to have an impressive wedding ceremony, all because of pride.

As Christians our primary concern must be God's attitude towards our wedding and not the attitude of our friends and family. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Pride in having a big wedding often leads to disgrace as people look down on someone who is proud (Proverbs 11:2). "Humility was accorded supreme excellence when Christ pronounced Himself 'gentle and lowly in heart'(Matthew 11:29). Conversely, pride (hyperephania) was placed on a list of defiling vices proceeding from the evil heart of man" (Douglas, 1962:1027). Pride often

leads to quarrels (Proverbs 13:10) as the couple struggle to pay off the huge debts. Pride leads to a fall (Proverbs 16:18; 18:12; 29:23).

3. *Preach on the Danger of Conforming to the World*

Pastors should compare what unbelievers are doing with their weddings and realise how Christians conform to the world. Many unsaved people are married in large churches with expensive weddings. Their marriages are essentially social occasions where they can display their wealth and importance. But Christians should marry within their means. The couple should be encouraged to be simple in their wedding plans.

The Christian is often pressed into the mould of society around him. Those who are not Christians are motivated by selfish concerns and ambitions. They desire the biggest and best so that others will be impressed. Instead of being lights in a dark world which is filled with pride and selfishness, Christians conform to the world. But God says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

"Conform" refers to a posture or attitude which may be changed at will, whereas "form" at the heart of "transformed" refers to what grows out of necessity from an inward condition. According to R.A.Harrisville(1980:191), "to be conformed", thus means to suit oneself to the changeable, to what is transitory and passes away".

The transformation is to take place by the renewing of your mind. "The believer, whose life is that of the new age, does not think like an unbeliever. The reference to the mind is important. Paul does not envisage a mindless emotionalism, but a deeply intelligent approach to life, as characteristic of the Christian who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit" (Morris,1988:435). The alternative to moral exercise is not sinless perfection; the problem of sin remains a reality. But according to F.F. Bruce (1963:), "It is by the power of the indwelling Spirit the pledge of their inheritance in coming age that they can

resist the tendency to live on the level of this age”

Instead of being proud and showing off for others, Christians should plan their weddings in order to glorify Christ and not be a burden to their friends or lead to a debt.

4. *Preach on the Need for Good Stewardship*

Christians must learn the importance of spending their material possessions wisely. Christians should invest their money for the glory of God rather than for themselves. Instead of spending all their money on an expensive Christian wedding they should invest it in families needing medical help, food and other essentials. Why become a burden to your friends and family and go into debt for a wedding ceremony which lasts for one day? Instead one should be spending money on that which has long-lasting value and which is truly needed.

“In the New Testament there are two words translated steward:

- (a) epitropos - Matthew 20:8; Galatians 4:2, i.e. one to whose care or honour one has been entrusted, a curator, a guardian and,
- (b) oikonomos - Luke 16:2,3; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10, i.e. a manager, a superintendent. oikos=house. nemo=to dispense or to manage” (Douglas, 1962:1216). Christians should manage responsibly what God puts into their care.

5. *Encourage Simpler Weddings*

Church leaders must be committed to reduce wedding expenses by promoting simple weddings. Some youth are willing to be married in a simple dress, but fear that pastors might question this. Elders and pastors may object to simple weddings, feeling that a poor wedding will spoil the image and reputation of the Church.

The real key to reducing the cost of Christian weddings is the commitment of the church leadership, including the pastors and elders. They are the ones who need to be convinced that Christian couples should be married with the blessing of the church. Pastors and elders are the ones who need to discuss these issues with the youth and their parents to promote Christian weddings that are attractive but simple and can be afforded by everyone.

6. *Re-evaluate Many Aspects of a Christian Wedding*

It seems strange that some of the basic elements of a Christian wedding in Africa today are customs adopted from the West, such as the bridal gown, bridal attendants with beautiful gowns and a wedding cake. A large reception can create much expense. Courageous thinking should be given to the essential elements of a Christian wedding.

Biblical principles need to be followed in fashioning a Christ-honouring Christian wedding in Africa. We should stop the trend toward competition and showing off. Some couples pay as much as N\$25,000 for a wedding. It is up to the pastor, elders and even the parents to educate the youth to keep their wedding simple.

But we need to encourage people to discuss this problem, so that they can make a joint decision. This is better than the pastor dictating. The fact is that white clothes do not make the wedding holy. Is there a way to help the Christian Church know that as long as the couple is pure, the type of dress is not essential? According to church tradition, white clothes may be associated with purity. But this tradition has been lost and has become meaningless. Can I advise the church to discourage extra expenses?

4.11 FAMILY PLANNING

The population growth on our continent cannot be left unattended to by Christian. It is our responsibility as God's co-workers (De Bruyn, 1993:113). Johan Heyns (1986: 195) says, "Being human also means being responsible".

In regard to family humans must also be responsible.

4.11.1 **The Cultural Basis for Family Planning**

Family planning as a concept is not foreign to the people of Africa. What is foreign to Africa are the methods that are being used today. The methods are foreign but not the concept. I spent some time with the San people (Bushman) of Namibia, talking specifically about family planning. Xui and Minna said, "Family planning was common among the San people". Their nomadic life style demands control on the number of children. Too many children can be exhausting and they could be in danger of being devoured by wild animals. The women use a mixture of certain roots to produce medicine for family planning. It is said to be very effective. I heard a testimony from nurse Mara who has been working at a clinic among the San people for a long time. She stated; "The San people refuse to take the medicines provided by the Health Service Department, because they believe that their own medicines are more effective". The slow population growth of the San people can partly also be contributed to their use of traditional contraceptives. It is only in the case of twins where killing the weak one is considered, but otherwise, like among all the African peoples, life is highly valued.

Another method used in Africa was the abstinence of women from sex during lactation. This could take up to three years in some cases. During this the wife is usually under the protection of her mother. This is in fact given as one of the positives of polygamy, because during that time the husband is with the other wives and does not need to seek sexual fulfilment somewhere else.

John Jefferson Davies (1993:16) also writes about the presence of artificial means of contraception in some of the ancient cultures; "Evidence for the use of artificial means of contraception reaches far back into the records of human history. Egypt papyri dating 1900~1100 B.C. show that Egyptian physicians offered prescriptions for the prevention of pregnancy".

4.11.2 **Reasons for Family Planning Today**

4.11.2.1 **Health Reasons**

Through family planning inheritable diseases can be avoided. The prospective parents who know that a particular disease "runs in the family" can reduce the risk of passing it on by applying family planning. Family planning also helps to preserve the health of the mother. Women with difficult pregnancies can jeopardize their health if they ignore family planning. Family planning allows time between births for the mother to recover and regain her strength (Golanty & Harris, 1982;309-310).

4.11.2.2 **Economic Reasons**

A large family involves more financial demands. With costs increasing today it is unwise for families to ignore family planning. Parents have to provide more space, more clothing, more school fees, a bigger vehicle, and so on, for a big family. And if parents cannot fulfil the basic needs of their family they become unhappy, which leads to marital problems. The children are affected negatively too if their basic demands(shelter, clothing and food) are not met. Their performance at school and interaction with others suffer as a result of ignorance regarding family planning.

The economic burden does not end with the family, but it extends to the country as a whole. Economic resources are scarce, thus parents need to take this into consideration too. The global economic situation needs to be considered, because with globalization the whole world is interdependent.

4.11.2.3 **Ecological Reasons**

A bigger population puts more demand on earth's resources. Space to build or cultivate is needed. Trees are cut for building purposes. More water is needed, more food is needed. We can rightly see that our ecology can also be negatively effected and even destroyed by over-population which leads to

over-utilization.

In the African culture having children is almost a demand and a prestige, but today we have to take the changing world into consideration. We must not produce what we cannot control and care for. It is very irresponsible for a Christian to bring a child into the world and not be able to provide a healthy living atmosphere for him or her.

4.11.3 **The Biblical Basis for Family Planning**

Is it Biblical for a Christian to practise family planning? (Heyns, 1986:196). Some Christians argue and say that it must be left up to God to control the population, because He said, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). Heyns, approaches this issue in two ways; he firstly says, "Man is created as a responsible being". It is in the essence of man to act responsibly. And secondly he mentions what he calls, the "dehumanizing" of man or "romanticizing" of nature.

Heyns further argues that the natural process of procreation is not normative to man and must not be equated with God's demands from His creation. The will of God for the Christian, is in the first place, not to be found in nature but in Scripture. Thus, says Heyns (1986:196-197), "Man must not be fatalistically handed over to the unavoidable consequences of sexual intercourse" (originally written in Afrikaans: "Daarom mag die mens ook nie fatalisties uitgelewer word aan die onvermydelike konsekwensies van die fisiese gebeure van geslagsgemeenskap nie").

In Heyns' argument it is not wrong for a Christian to apply an acceptable family planning method. But he warns Christians to guard against *egoistic* and *selfish* reasons for family planning. The researcher also agrees with Heyns in this regard and urges Christians to act responsibly in this regard.

4.12 POLYGAMY

The traditional reasons for polygamy in Africa are mentioned in chapter 2. The Biblical position on polygamy is also dealt with in chapter 3.

The economic benefit of polygamy that was present in the African tradition is not possible in most cases today. Husbands today are exposed to more economic burdens when they are in polygamous relationships. Today children go to schools, wear different clothes and eat different foods. In many cases the parents suffer economically in such relationships. This is not to say that where an economic burden is absent polygamy can be practised. I am simply referring to some of the traditional reasons that are not relevant today. Childlessness is not a reason for polygamy.

The Biblical principles given in chapter 3 are clear enough for people not to choose polygamy. It is an act of deliberate disobedience and a sin against God if someone chooses polygamy today. Pride and lust are the ruling forces in such a relationship today. Therefore, the church must take a strong stand and speak out against all sin. Wherever the Bible gives different options, then different viewpoints should be allowed. But where there is no other option it must be put straight to the Church.

Lust, desire for prestige and unfulfilled marriages may lead to polygamy. The Church in Africa must prepare her members to be able to fight these temptations. Maturity is important in the body of Christ. It is through maturity that we can resist the devil. Our close relationship with Christ will help us to know Him more and knowing Him more (with heart and mind) means walking in His path.

According to Shorter (1973:174), "Polygamy creates a family of considerable legal complexity, lessens the educative influence of the father over his children, and is irreconcilable with the educational and economic emancipation of women and the desire of women to play independent roles in society". It is also known to be one of the principal causes of desertion and

divorce. In many cases the first wife is alienated and may leave the husband or even get involved in a sexual relationship with another man. The practice must not be promoted.

It becomes more difficult when a husband or one of the wives in a polygamous relationship becomes a Christian. The traditional approach with regard to man was for him to leave all the other wives and remain with the first wife. This approach did not help much because the women were exposed to many social complexities. Children were neglected, and the wife was still regarded as married by the community, so she could not remarry.

The researcher proposes that the Christian Church in Africa must not promote polygamy. It must never be allowed for Christians to marry more than one wife or for a woman to be married as a second or third wife. But the Church must act differently in a case where the relationship has been established already. In such a case the researcher proposes that the relationship should remain. Roy W. Fairchild (1964:52) says, "In societies where polygamous marriage prevails, it is not sufficient to change the marriage form alone. In fact to alter such a practice abruptly, not realizing that it is tied in with the life and values of a society, could bring only hardship. It is too easy for a Christian missionary to say bluntly, "To be a Christian you must get rid of all but one of your wives". Is this a condition of becoming a Christian? Are we saved by monogamy or by grace? We must consider the consequences of such rigid, abrupt changes". Under intensive counselling the family must learn to live together in **peace**. **Faithfulness** and **commitment** in such a relationship must also be emphasised. On the basis of the commitment of this people to their relationship, the Church can decide on how to deal with them when it comes to baptism and the holy communion. Markus Barth(1979:750) says, "Polygamy in all its public and private forms is practically excluded. But there is no explicit injunction in the New Testament to dissolve polygamous ties entered into before the baptism of husbands and /or wives".

We must not forget that we are here talking about a relationship that was created under

customary laws. We are also talking about laws created by people who were only exposed to the natural or general revelation. "Before they even had contact with the Bible, God already spoke to the hearts and the consciences of the people of Africa" (Van der Walt, 1994:213). We must also remember that for each one of the wives there was a ceremony and a bride price was paid. I think that it will be unethical just to annul all of that. "Christians must be concerned with demonstrating the Good News in relationships, both marital and racial, than with setting up new legalisms that can throw an entire culture out of joint if imposed without understanding patience" (Fairchild, 1964:52-53). We must also recognize the fact that even Israel imperfectly understood (for example the practice of polygamy) what God was trying to make clear to them until at last the world was confronted by the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

4.13 MARRIAGE OF WIDOWS and WIDOWERS

Traditionally widows could only marry the brother of their deceased husband or a close relative. In the case of the widower, he was provided with a wife by his late wife's family. In Namibia this practice is more prevalent among the Herero. Some husbands ended up having two wives, because of the levirate.

In chapter 3 I emphasised the fact that a Christian marriage can only take place between two Christians. I also emphasised the fact that a Christian can only get married to another Christian. I think that with some of these principles we can urge the widow and widower to seek God's guidance in their situation. A person is under no obligation to marry after the death of a spouse, although they are free to do so according to Scripture. If a widow or widower decides not to marry, the Church must not put pressure on such a person to marry. For those who want to get married, they must be carefully guided in order to make the right choice.

A Christian widow or widower must know that she or he should not allow herself or himself to be married to an unbeliever. Despite the pressure the family might put on such a person, God's will must be obeyed at all times.

Christian husbands must also make their desire known to their parents and extended family members. Usually the decision of a deceased person is very much respected in Africa. If you tell your parents that you do not want your wife to be inherited, it is likely that your desire will be respected.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

As the term "family" has different meanings what is meant by "family" in this chapter needs to be clarified. Following are two definitions. "The U.S.A. Census Bureau defines a family as a group of two or more persons who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. While two spouses or two siblings may constitute their own family, the term usually implies the presence of children " (Knox, 1979:8). George Peter Murdock (quoted by Golanty and Harris, 1982:6) defined the family as "a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, [either their] own or adopted, of sexually cohabiting adults". Both these definitions describe the so-called conjugal, or nuclear, family, which consists of a husband, a wife, and offspring. In the West the nuclear family is the principal family unit. The family into which one is born is called the family of origin or orientation and when one is married and have children, one becomes a member of the family of procreation. This type of family structure is foreign to the African mind. This is also true in reverse - the African family structure is foreign to the Western mind therefore it must have been difficult for Western missionaries to help African Christians in issues which involved family dynamics.

The family structure in Africa is based upon consanguine relationships. "The consanguine or extended family is either a nuclear family linked by a common ancestry to other kin relations or more nuclear families that live together or near each other" (Golante & Harris: 1982:7). Consanguine means of the same blood, or biologically connected while conjugal means the marital unit, the husband-and-wife relationship.

People in extended family relationships have access to a wide support

structure which is limited within a nuclear family unit. Stress and other related problems are treated on a wider basis. Traditionally the extended family was also better equipped economically and psychologically. The elderly could be cared for properly. A nuclear family unit does not have all the support present in an extended family unit. For example if one of the partners dies, a disruption takes place which the member has to deal with alone.

Recently a lot of changes have taken place. The environment has changed. Our parents lived in rural areas where they could build their own houses. As many houses as were needed could be built. There was no need to pay for the house, or water and electricity. There were no school fees, or other financial demands experienced. Now currently it is not easy and, in some cases, it is impossible to support an extended family financially. However, emotional support is still possible. "Today many of the family tasks have been taken over by or delegated to other societal relationships such as, for example, the factory, business world, school, church and state. The family is therefore no longer such a comprehensive community with regard to its responsibilities. Its task is shrinking and becoming more and more limited to the upbringing, care and protection of the closest members" (Van der Walt, 1994:414).

The purpose of talking about the nuclear and the extended family is not to make comparisons or to grade them. The purpose is to give a picture of the struggle in which the African Christian finds him- or herself. On the one hand he has his parents, on the other, his spouse and children. The African Christian is familiar with a relationship where the whole extended family is supported equally along with the spouse and children. This responsibility for the nuclear and the extended family causes tension in many Christian families in Africa. Sometimes the husband neglects his wife and pays all his attention to his parents, especially in a patrilineal extended family. In a patrilineal extended family the family of the husband is important. In the same way in a matrilineal extended family the wife can forget her husband while paying all her attention to her parents. In a matrilineal extended family the husband becomes part of his wife's family. This happens, for example among the

Damara people of Namibia.

The African Christian man and woman must realise that by getting married they have entered a unique relationship with one another. And this new relationship needs fostering as the Lord demands. A Christian couple must not neglect their parents, but at the same time they must know that a heavier emphasis has to be put on their own family relationship. Thus our emphasis in this chapter will be on the relationship between a husband-wife and children. "Family" will primarily mean married parents living together with children who are related to them by blood or adoption. However we must not forget the fact that, as Christians, we belong to a larger family than our family of origin or spouse and children. Jesus said: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:34-35).

Otto Piper (1970:288) says, "The family is an institution willed by God to serve the ends He has with mankind." He further states, "According to the New Testament, the family mirrors the relationship in which God stands to mankind" (:288). In view of this we must also conclude that God has some principles by which He wants to guide the family. When human society ignores God's teaching about family relationships, the family begins to fall apart, followed by society falling apart.

Each family member needs to know and exercise his or her role within the family. These roles need to be understood in the light of Scripture. The healthy functioning of a Christian family depends on all members involved. Johan Heyns (1986:189) says, "Amongst all social systems, the family is perhaps the system with the most delicate, serious and intimate social-psychological relationships"(own translation from Afrikaans). Paying attention to family does not mean neglecting the marital relationship. The family must never be seen as an extended marriage (Heyns, 1986:190). There is a great need for successful mothers and fathers.

When the Word of God is ignored, misinterpreted or misapplied the result is a

dysfunctional polarised family. The aim of applying God's Word appropriately is to create harmonious and functional families. It should be no great surprise to us today when we see people fighting for the rights of women through feminist theology. All feminist beliefs cannot be justified but still we cannot ignore the fact that the role of women has been manipulatively interpreted by Christians. The complementarity and partnership between men and women and children has become distasteful to the world because of our interpretation and application of it.

Both Christian and non-Christian families are confused. In many instances science is used as the source for information on the family. The psychologist can be asked about patterns of mothering and their effect on children's personalities and some very useful information will be given. The cultural anthropologist, who studies the socially inherited behaviour patterns in different societies, can be asked about the first forms of family life and a detailed description of evidence and hypotheses will be given. "When we ask what is the purpose of man and his ultimate origin, nature, and destiny, we do not look to science for an answer. It is the Bible's purpose to reveal the Source of all life and its meaning and purpose in history" (Fairchild,1964:16). Jesus saw life as a unity under the sovereignty of God. A neat division of life into the sacred and profane, the "spiritual" and the "material," is precisely what he came to eradicate. Our everyday experience is important to God who entered our life as "Emmanuel"(Matthew 1:23). Let us now look at the practical implications of Biblical truth on the family.

5.1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A HUSBAND TO HIS WIFE

We, as parents give massive amounts of time, attention, and effort to our children. As a result, father and mother put most of their energies into chauffeuring, sponsoring children's clubs, and trying to make the children happy and popular. We end up having little time to be a husband and a wife to each other. It is possible to get so busy being parents that we forget how to be husband and wife or just persons together.

There are different Scriptures which teach the responsibilities of husbands to their wives, for example, Genesis 3:16; Proverbs 5:15-19; I Corinthians 7:3,4; 11:3; Ephesians 5:23-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Timothy 3:4,5; I Peter 3:7. These Scriptures give the two primary responsibilities of the husband: a) to love his wife, and b) to lead his wife.

5.1.1. Loving His Wife

The husband must love his wife. This is not something optional, it is a Scriptural command and an obligation.

There are different words for love in the Greek language; *philia* refers to love between friends; *storge* refers to the love of parents for their children; *eros* refers to sensual love, which is the erotic love between the sexes. The fourth word used in the New Testament for love and found in Ephesians 5:25-33 is *agape*. This is a love which values the other person and is measured by personal sacrifice to meet the needs of the other person (De Bruyn, 1993:115)

According to the Scriptures, husbands are supposed to love their wives as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:28,33) and as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

5.1.1.1. Loving his wife as he loves himself

Every Christian ought to love himself (Proverbs 19:8; Ephesians 5:28), (De Bruyn, 1993:140). De Bruyn (1993:140) continues and says, "this love for self must not turn into selfishness". The same amount of unselfish love that is demonstrated towards self must be demonstrated towards one's spouse. As the Bible says, "no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it" (Ephesians 5:29).

In the same way a husband is called upon to love his wife. This calls for sacrifice. The husband is to be as concerned about the welfare of his wife as he is concerned about his own body. Can there be any greater love than this?

Yes, there is a greater love.

5.1.1.2. Loving his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

Christ's love for his church is so great that we cannot describe it fully. His love involved great personal sacrifice, dying for those who had rejected him. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Christ loved us unconditionally. He died for us even when we were sinners, before we had repented and turned to him (Romans 5:8). Christ chose to love us freely, of his own free will. God's gift of salvation grew out of his free, sovereign grace (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:6,7).

Christ loves us intensely, so much that He even died for us when we were His enemies (Ephesians 2:4; 5:2). Christ was unselfish in His love for us, for He gave up many of his rights in order to meet our needs (Philippians 2:6,7).

Christ's love for the church was not because of the beauty and perfection of the church but because of his personal commitment to cleanse her and purify her for himself (Ephesians 5:25-27). Christ's love was sacrificial to the extent of giving his own life to save us. His love was intense beyond description (Romans 5:6-11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:4; 5:2,25).

5.1.1.3. Practical Applications

1. The husband should show his wife that he loves her. A husband should not assume that his wife knows of his love. He should communicate with words and actions, expressing his deep feelings and affection for her.

Traditionally, men in Africa seldom expressed in words their love for their wives, except when an older man married a younger woman. Women in the past did not expect to hear the words, "I love you". Instead, men expressed their love through deeds of kindness (*oviuonda* - Otjiherero). A man might help his wife by organising with the children to gather the

firewood. If she was sick he might slaughter an animal to please her. Their love was, never verbalised but was assumed that a husband loved his wife.

One grandfather never said to his wife, in hearing of his grandson, "I love you." But the way he talked about her before others, the way he consulted her on various issues, he showed that he really loved his wife. Everyone knew this.

Today things are changing. Most wives want to hear their husbands assure them of their love with words. Culture is not static. Women today are not like women in the past. It may still be difficult for men today to express in words their love for their wives. But men cannot escape the need to show their love for their wives, for this is the command of Scripture.

2. The husband should be kind to his wife. He should avoid harsh words when speaking to her. If a husband does become harsh, he must ask his wife's forgiveness. In addition, he may express his repentance through deeds of kindness.

Most men find it difficult to ask their wives for forgiveness. "I cannot say 'sorry' to my wife", one man commented. But a Christian husband should be willing to humble himself, admit to his wife that he was wrong and seek her forgiveness.

Men should show kindness by being courteous in word and deed. A thoughtful husband who shows kindness and thoughtfulness to his wife is thereby expressing love for her. The common practice of beating a wife is not an expression of love.

3. The husband should provide for the needs of his wife, whatever those needs may be. If a husband truly loves his wife, he will sense when she

is physically tired and emotionally strained. When she is sick, she needs assistance. When she has too much work, she needs help. When she is discouraged, she needs an understanding and encouraging husband. When she needs to get away from all the heavy work, the husband should make this possible. The husband should meet her spiritual, social and sexual needs (1 Corinthians 7:3,4).

4. The husband should protect his wife from physical harm. He should protect her from being overworked with the children and other responsibilities in the house.

He should also protect her from gossip and slander in the community. Some newly married wives may not be loved and appreciated by their in-laws. The husband's family complains to him about his new wife. But he should defend her and support her.

5. The husband should help in the home with cooking, shopping, cleaning and caring for the children. This kind of work for the man is not customary and may be frowned on by other men. In the past men only went to the market to talk with other men. For a man to hold a child and look after him or her may seem strange. However, by helping his wife with the chores in the house, a husband will communicate his love for her.

More than this, helping his wife in the home benefits the husband himself. It is helpful for the husband to serve along side of the wife in the home in order to learn how to cook and care for the children. If a man's wife becomes sick or dies, he may not know how to care for himself and his children. In the old days men only lived in the villages. But today men work in the city and must learn how to cook for themselves. There is a whole generation of men today who have difficulty caring for themselves because they cannot cook, clean the house or care for

children.

6. The husband should show love to his wife by demonstrating how much he values her. If a husband compares her unfavourably with other women, this puts her down and discourages her. For example, some men complain that other women can cook better than their wives can. Such comparisons do not build her up but discourage her.

5.1.2. Leading His Wife

The second responsibility of a Christian husband in marriage is to be the head of the home. In traditional African culture the husband was the undisputed head of the wife. His word was final. He was the "owner" of the family. The wife was not an equal partner who could share in the decision making.

In western culture today many women are claiming equality with the man in every dimension of life, including marriage. A movement among some women is to deny the headship of the husband in the home. Whereas the marriage vows for the woman used to always include the promise "to obey" her husband, this pledge is now often removed from the marriage vows.

According to the Bible, the woman is totally equal to the man in her personal dignity and relationship with God. In Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Complete unity and equality before God prevails among all of God's children. He shares equally with husbands and wives.

But according to the Scriptures there is a divine order in authority written into the laws of the universe (I Corinthians 11:3). Even as God the Father is the Head of the Son, Jesus Christ, and even as Christ is the Head of the church, His Body, so the man is the head of the woman in marriage (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:23). Both husband and wife cannot be leaders in marriage. A 50-50 or democratic marriage cannot work. God has ordained the husband to have the final authority in marriage.

But unlike in many cultures, this rule and authority of the husband according to the Bible is to be exercised in love as described above. And the authority is to be patterned after the biblical concept of a leader with Jesus Christ being the model.

5.1.2.1. ***Being a leader is to serve***

Those in authority in this world love to "lord" it over others. But Jesus contrasted this with the leadership in the kingdom of God. "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve ..." (Matthew 20:26-28). "To be named 'servant' is to be recognized as one whom God has shaped with special care and to whom He is personally committed" (Richards, et al., 1980:103).

Jesus gave himself as a model when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:1-15). While his apostles refused to humble themselves and take the place of a servant, Jesus himself became a servant, washing their feet. Thus Jesus cut across the very nature of fallen man which desires to be master and lord. "To be named 'servant' by God is no invitation to an inferior calling! God's servants are always special to Him even when Israel failed in her calling as a servant, God's commitment was never shaken, and He has promised to restore" (L.O. Richards, et al., 1980:103). Pride is at the heart of the sinful nature. Leaders tend to exercise their authority in the pattern of the proud, sinful nature. But the leadership modelled by Christ is one of humility and servanthood (Philippians 2:1-8).

5.1.2.2. ***As the leader in the home, a husband should serve his wife***

"The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church..." (Ephesians 5:23). Christ's modelling of servant leadership can teach the husband of his leadership role in the family. "St. Augustine comments that, "Eve was not taken from Adam's feet to be his slave, nor from his head to be

his ruler, but from his side to be his beloved partner" (Fairchild, 1964:55). The husband should rely on God's wisdom in order to be a faithful servant. "The servant never relies on himself to achieve success but always remembers that the only hope of effectiveness for his ministry rests in God" (Richards, et al., 1980:110).

5.1.2.3. Practical Applications

1. A wife should submit to her husband even though he is not all that he should be. In one sense love and submission go hand in hand. A husband can easily love a wife who submits to him. And a wife can easily submit to a husband who loves her. It is not easy to submit to someone who is harsh and unkind.

However, the Bible teaches that a wife should submit to her husband even though he may disappoint her. Some husbands may not be harsh but they may be thoughtless in their behaviour by living in their own world or not caring for the wife. The biblical command for a wife to submit does not depend on the kind of husband she has. A wife should submit even to her unbelieving husband (I Peter 3:1-6).

2. Submission and obedience are not understood by many men and women

Many men think that they have the right to command and dictate in every area of the life of their wives. Wives are not treated as equals before God. Men do not listen to their wives but instead demand that they do whatever they command. Many wives are treated as if they have no minds or personalities. Their only duty is to obey the husband's dictates.

On the other hand, some women may submit outwardly while inwardly they resent the husband. They may submit only because they fear their husbands. The Bible teaches that a wife's submission should be sincere and from the heart.

The wife and husband should be a team, working together. A wise husband listens to his wife and learns from her. He seeks counsel and advice from her. But after much thought, discussion and prayer, when a decision must be made, the head of the home, namely, the husband, is to make the final decision. In this context the wife should submit to the head of the home.

5.2. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WIFE TO HER HUSBAND

Just as a husband has certain responsibilities in the home, so does the wife. There are many Scriptures that discuss a wife's part in marriage: Genesis 2:18-25; Proverbs 31:10-31; Ephesians 5:22-24,33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-6. These Scriptures teach that a wife's primary responsibility to her husband is submission and obedience.

Markus Barth(1979:757) says, "Unlike many Greek, Latin, and rabbinical teachers of ethics, Paul does not only or primarily address the free male members of the human society. He make wives, children, and slaves as responsible for a good social order as those who wield, or presume to possess, superior power. When Paul places major emphasis on the contribution of the supposedly 'weaker' members, in actuality he takes a revolutionary step. They above all should and will be the corners of responsibility, changes and progress". .

5.2.1. What Submission Does Not Mean

Many modern women reject the teaching that a wife should submit to and obey her husband. This may be due to human sinfulness, rebelling against the will of God. Or it may be due to a misunderstanding of what the Bible means when it teaches wives to submit to their husbands.

5.2.1.1. Submission does not mean that the wife no longer thinks and uses her gifts and abilities.

In Proverbs 31:10-31 we find the longest description of a wife with noble character. "She is worth far more than rubies", not because she is an unthinking, obedient slave of her husband. She is worth much because of her creativity, initiative and intelligence. She has initiative to select wool and flax to make into fine linen. She has authority to buy a field and plant a vineyard from her own income. She trades profitably and works hard so that the family has plenty during the winter. She cares for the affairs of her household. "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (31:25,26).

In brief, this woman has the opportunity of using all her strength and abilities in a creative manner. She is not inferior to her husband in ability or worth. She has a fulfilling life and is worthy of praise and recognition. "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate" (31:31).

5.2.1.2. Submission does not mean that she is a slave who cannot open her mouth and give advice.

The Bible is filled with examples of wives who had an influential position in the family by advising, counselling and assisting the husband in the ministry. In the Old Testament we find the wife of Manoah giving wise counsel to him after the angel of the Lord appeared and announced the birth of Samson (Judges 13:21-23). In the New Testament Priscilla was the suitable helper of her husband, Aquilla, who together invited Apollos into their home and together they explained the Word of God more fully to him (Acts 18:24-26). According to many examples in Scripture, the wife is a full partner in marriage who participates in the many decisions that must be made.

5.2.1.3. **Submission is not the duty of inferior people but is the responsibility of every Christian.**

Before Paul teaches the wives to submit to their husbands, he writes, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Pride is the root of evil that leads to conflict and violence. No one is exempt from the danger of pride, not even leaders. Yes, we would all agree with Peter when he writes, "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older". That is culturally acceptable and biblical. But Peter continues, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"(1 Peter 5:5).

Should husbands submit to their wives? Yes, in many ways. In wisdom God has given to each man a suitable helper who has the potential to be spiritual, intelligent and wise. A husband must learn humility and submit to his wife's advice whenever this counsel is wise. A truly successful marriage is one in which the husband and wife both submit to each other. "In the New Testament times wives were still to submit to their husbands, but the love that the husbands were to have for their wives was itself to be a kind of submission. This is true because when you love someone you submit to what you know he or she wants, by positively putting the other first" (Gower, 1987:59).

5.2.2. ***What Submission Does Mean***

The submission of wives is the divine order of marriage. There can be no 50-50 or democratic marriage in which both husband and wife are the two heads of the family. God has ordained that the husband is the head of the home and the wife submits. Yes, both submit to one another as humble Christians. But when discussion, thought and prayer are finished, the wife submits to the final decision of the husband.

But submission does not mean inferiority of the person and her relationship with the Lord. Did Jesus not submit himself to Mary and Joseph as a twelve year old boy (Luke 2:51)? Surely, Jesus was not inferior to his mother but in

God's order of human society children must obey their parents. Does not the Bible teach that God the Father is the head of Christ (I Corinthians 11:3)? Surely, this does not mean that God the Son is inferior to God the Father. The Bible clearly teaches the three Persons of the Trinity are of the same substance and eternally equal in their attributes and glory and equally worthy of worship. But human society is modelled after the order within the Trinity. There is, as it were, a division of labour and responsibility within the Trinity.

So it is with the husband and wife. The wife is most free when she submits to her husband because she is free to be what God intended her to be, namely, "a suitable helper for him" (Genesis 2:18).

5.2.2.1. ***The submission of wives is a spiritual exercise***

Paul writes, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). In human society submission is not always easy because we are all fallen human beings whose pride makes us want to be the leader and not a follower. But obedience to God is an act of worship, acknowledging that he is Lord. When a wife submits to her husband, "as to the Lord," she is admitting that her supreme Master is the Lord, not her husband. Submission to her husband can and should be an act of worship as she recognizes that this action is pleasing to God and according to His will. When she obeys her husband, she is really obeying God who commanded her to obey and submit.

Submitting to leaders is not easy because leaders do make mistakes. Is there a perfect leader anywhere who is always right? No, and neither are husbands always right. That is the reason husbands must exercise their authority with humility and seek the wisdom of their wives. They should also humble themselves and admit their errors whenever mistakes are made. Nevertheless, in God's order there must be leaders and followers. This is God's eternal plan for his creation.

When a wife submits to her husband this can be a painful experience because she may believe that her husband has made a serious error. However, this is

an opportunity for her to grow in grace, crucify her old nature and learn the grace of Christian maturity as she submits to God's will according to the Scripture. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit will she be able to submit with a positive, cheerful attitude that reflects true obedience from the heart.

5.2.2.2. ***The submission of wives is voluntary, continual and required***

Nowhere does the Bible teach that the husbands must force wives to submit. Husbands are told plainly not to be harsh and cruel to their wives (Colossians 3:19). But wives are commanded to submit of their own free will. What if the wife refuses to submit? The Christian husband must learn to win the submission of his wife through love, example, prayer and patient teaching. Physical beating is not God's will.

This voluntary submission must be continual. A wife's submission is not based on what her husband does but on the clear and plain command of God according to the Scriptures. As we have stated before, this does not mean that the wife cannot or should not share her own insights. Whenever she feels that her husband's thoughts or plans are unwise, she ought to have the freedom and respect to express herself. A wise, spiritual husband will welcome her input. Nevertheless, when the decision has to be made, the wife must submit to the husband's decision because this is the command from God Himself.

The submission of wives is modelled after the submission of the church to the Lord Jesus. "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:23,24).

This means that the wife cannot pick and choose when she will submit. Even as God "appointed him [Christ] to be head over everything for the church" (Ephesians 1:22), so God has appointed the husband to be the head of the

wife in everything" (Ephesians 5:24).

Nevertheless, there are limitations. Though the Bible compares the wife to the church and the husband to Christ, there is a major difference. Christ is the sovereign Lord, perfect in all his thoughts and deeds toward his church. But people are fallen human beings who may act contrary to the will of God. Therefore, wives are to submit only "as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). There are times when the husband may tell his wife to do something that is contrary to the will of God. As a Christian the wife's first responsibility is to please God. She pleases God by obeying her husband whenever such obedience is not contrary to the will of God. She also pleases God by keeping God first in all things. This may mean that in a particular situation she cannot do as her husband has said.

5.2.2.3. ***The Submission of Wives is a Woman's Power***

How can a woman gain entrance into her husband's heart? It is through submission (I Peter 3:1-6). Many women face the difficult problem of having husbands who are not committed Christians. Their husbands may be cruel and harsh. They may refuse to hear the gospel or go to church. How can she win her husband to the Lord and to herself? According to Peter the way is through submission.

Contrary to popular opinion, physical force is not the greatest power on earth. A person can compel someone to obey him through brute force but he cannot win that person's heart. The Bible teaches and experience proves that a wife can win her husband to herself and to the Lord by submitting to her husband. Herein lies the woman's power. The woman's weakness (submission) becomes her strength and power to win her husband to Christ and to herself.

5.3. **RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN**

Fairchild (1964:100) says, "No parent is perfect and no marriage is without its flaws. Yet, within an understanding of Christian faith, it is necessary to see

that even imperfect people can be God's servants in their child-rearing efforts. This is not to say that we can ever guarantee the outcome. We deal with persons, not with clay". Parents have the responsibility to teach their children in the ways of the Lord. Parents do not own their children like properties, children belong to the Lord (Fairchild, 1964:101-106; Heyns, 1986:219; De Bruyn, 1993:117). Parenthood is not confined to the biological fact of giving life to a child; it is also a relationship of persons to a person. As such it implies the special responsibility parents have for the education of their children.

The Bible clearly lays out God's plan for parents to rear their children. There is much teaching in Scripture on this but the best is Ephesians 6:9. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord".

5.3.1. *Who is Responsible to Rear Children?*

The Bible clearly indicates that mothers are involved in the rearing of their children. Mothers together with the fathers are to be equally respected by their children (Exodus 20:12). Mothers give instruction along with the fathers (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20).

Nevertheless, Paul addresses this word of instruction to fathers and not to the mothers. As the head of the home the father has the privilege of authority to exercise control over his family. God planned it this way. But with privilege comes responsibility. The father is responsible to participate in the training of his children. He is responsible to ensure that his children are raised properly.

So often the father neglects this responsibility. Many times he is away from home because of work. The children are left to the mother for training. Even if the father stays at home most of the time, he often expects his wife to train their children. He hands over his own responsibility to his wife because he is "too busy" with other activities. He comes home late at night after family worship and after the children have been put to bed. In the morning the children are off to school early and he has no time with them.

The result is seen all too often. When the figure of authority in the home is gone, control may be lacking. The mother finds it difficult to control and discipline her children as she should, especially the young boys as they grow up. Without the father giving firm, biblical teaching the growing boys and girls are moulded instead by the behaviour and values of their age group in school.

The fact is that the primary responsibility for rearing children rests with the father. The Bible clearly expects the father to be the manager of his home. One of the qualifications of an elder is his ability to "manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (I Timothy 3:4,5).

Managing of course assumes that others are there to help him. The father does not rear his children by himself. The father delegates responsibilities to his wife. But it is important for both father and mother to co-operate in working out agreed policies and practices so that they both are united in their rearing of children. Agreement on how to raise children is a crucial part of parent teamwork. A child needs the teamwork of a loving mother and father. Fathers and mothers bring different gifts to the arduous task of raising their offspring (Fairchild, 1964).

5.3.2. *How Do They Rear Children?*

Paul says, "bring them up in the training [discipline] and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Several truths are taught here. The relationship of the child with God is essential, thus parents have to pay undivided attention to this aspect (Heyns,1986:227-228; De Bruyn,1993:119-121).

5.3.2.1. *Active and continual effort is needed to rear children*

Children must not be left to themselves, parents must constantly guide them in all aspects. The Bible teaches that a child left to himself will come to ruin. "A child left to himself disgraces his mother" (Proverbs 29:15).

A continual and active effort is needed in rearing children. Children are a blessing, yes indeed. But they are also a responsibility. Children left to themselves, without proper training, will bring disgrace to the family. When fathers and mothers are too busy to rear their children properly, they have failed as parents.

5.3.2.2. ***Positive and constructive effort is needed to rear children***

Many times parents are busy "putting down" their children instead of "bringing them up". They put them down by communicating a negative attitude toward the children by punishing them frequently, scolding them and tearing down their self-esteem. When children disobey they must obviously be disciplined. But there is a right way and a wrong way to discipline children. "High standards, taught without an atmosphere of forgiving love, may produce a long-faced, humourless moralism, but not the freedom with which Christ makes us free" (Fairchild, 1964:135).

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children". Sometimes children cannot do anything right. Parents often punish them very severely and very often. "Fathers are urged to heed the discipline which the Lord himself exerts" (Barth, 1979:755). "Fathers are to be wise and humble educators" (:757). The rules of the home may be too many. The rules of behaviour may change or be unclear. Thus punishment comes when the child does not realise he has done something wrong. In this way the parents are unreasonable. This only discourages the children and makes them bitter. Such discipline brings resentment.

Instead of this negative, we need to encourage them, praise them, compliment them and train them in the way they should go. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This surely includes discipline. But only positive and constructive training will produce positive results.

5.3.2.3 **Careful and faithful teaching is needed to rear children**

Bringing up children includes "instruction". Animals know how to cope in life by instinct, but children do not. They must learn through instruction. Children left to themselves engage in all kinds of anti-social behaviour, including aggression, hostility, violence, drug abuse and immorality. This is evident in street children who have been abandoned and have no instruction.

Parents need to arrange formal times when the parents and children meet together for family worship when they can read the Scriptures, discuss the meaning and application of Scripture, sing and pray together. Fathers and mothers need to teach their children the way of salvation and lead their own children to Christ. Parents must not depend on school and church to teach them the Bible. Parents must teach the principles of conduct and model these principles in the home. Parents must teach the wonderful truths of God, Jesus Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit and the blessed hope of the believer.

Parents have the opportunity to teach and train their children throughout the day in various activities. Applying God's Word to life situations can have a powerful influence on young lives. God is made real to the children as He is brought into the daily activities. The things of God are not limited to formal times in church and the home. God is real and vital every moment of the day.

5.3.2.4 **Discipline is needed to rear children**

Discipline is a subject which confuses the modern parent more than almost any other feature of child rearing. The word "discipline" has a long history. Basically, it means "learning" and comes from the Greek word *disceo*. Thus we speak of "professional disciples". It denotes deep, significant learning as implied in the word "discipline" (Fairchild, 1964:111). The word, "training", in Ephesians 6:4 could better be translated "discipline" for it has the implication of correction. There is much teaching in Scripture on the importance of disciplining a child. The Bible is clear. Because of the sinful, fallen nature of human beings, discipline is important (Heyns, 1986:221). "He who spares the

rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24).

There is a right way of disciplining and a wrong way of disciplining. Much discipline only brings "exasperation" because the parents are unreasonable. While discipline of children is clearly taught in Scripture, parents are also warned against a wrong kind of discipline that leads to anger, bitterness and exasperation. Punishment can enforce obedience, but obedience is not the goal; it is but a first step in parent-child relations. Self-control and self-discipline are the goal for Christians. "It is only when discipline is *internalized* that children can become *disciples*" (Fairchild, 1964: 111).

5.4. RESPONSIBILITY OF CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS

Children have two responsibilities, summed up in the words of Paul, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise ..." (Ephesians 6:1,2).

5.4.1. Obedience

5.4.1.1. *Importance of Obedience*

The Bible makes it very clear that, it is the will of God for children to obey their parents. The Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases God" (Colossians 3:20) (De Bruyn, 1993:124-126)

God demands obedience from children to their parents (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20).

5.4.1.2. *Value of Obedience*

Parents are like the tools which cut and shape a beautiful diamond. Parents are not perfect. Nor do they always make wise decisions. Parents, both

Christian and non-Christian, may have values and goals which are not biblical. Yet God is pleased to shape the lives of children through those He places in authority over them. Only a foolish child will resist his parents' control and disobey their will. "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures" (Proverbs 30:17).

Christian young people may face difficult times from their non-Christian parents who do not have the same values as their Christian children. Parents may oppose a young man marrying a certain Christian young woman. They may oppose him going to Bible school to study for ministry. They may even oppose him attending church. What should the Christian youth do?

In such circumstances the character of the young person is moulded and shaped as he seeks God's will and grace to respond wisely to his parents. If a youth responds with anger or bitterness, this is not a good testimony before his non-Christian parents. If he shows them disrespect and disobedience, this is displeasing to the Lord. In this situation he has the opportunity of learning patience, love, and kindness during difficult times. The youth will have opportunity to pray, seek God's face and trust the Lord to guide him into God's perfect will.

Generally speaking, a child has no choice. For God says, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord". Children are not given the privilege of deciding when or whether they should obey. But the Christian young person must realise that God is able to accomplish His purpose in his life through his parents (even non-Christian parents) who have been placed over him. His character will be moulded as he submits his will to God. Patience, faith, hope, love, kindness, respect and many other virtues can be learned in this difficult situation when he seeks to obey his parents.

5.4.1.3. ***Obedience in the Lord***

Neither kings, presidents nor parents have absolute and final authority over a

Christian. God commands children to obey "in the Lord". There are limits to parental authority. If the parents forbid their child from believing in Christ, the child must obey God rather than his parents. Should parents forbid their adult son from attending Bible school to study for Christian ministry? There are obvious limitations in parental authority. But it will take great maturity to know when and how to go contrary to the wishes of the parents. For the one responsibility which children have toward their parents is obedience.

5.4.1.4 ***Honour and Respect***

Children must learn to honour and respect their parents as children. If they have not learned this by the time of adolescence, there is little hope for the youth. In order for parents to manage their children, those children must learn to respect and honour their parents (De Bruyn, 1993:124). In order for children to grow up into respectful, law abiding citizens, they must learn to respect their parents.

Disrespect can be shown in different ways. To disobey is to disrespect. Talking back, arguing with the parents, walking away in anger, slamming the door, a look of anger are some of the ways a child can show disrespect.

Because of their sinful nature, children will show disrespect from time to time. Through discipline they must be taught that such disrespect will not be tolerated. The best opportunity to communicate is after the punishment. Explain clearly why they were punished. Remind them of your love for them. But instruct them that they cannot be allowed to show disrespect.

Living a good life before them is important to encourage respect. Children should learn to respect those in authority over them, not because of the parents' personal character but because of their position of authority. Nevertheless, when the parents conduct themselves in a respectful manner and when they relate well with their children, this also helps children to show respect.

Conclusion

Problems of parenthood frequently represent problems in the marriage. We must put a lot of emphasis upon the husband-wife relationship, because it is crucial to the life of the family. Parents may be ever so diligent in taking the children to Sunday school, and in carrying out religious practices at home, but something does not ring true to the child. The sacred name of Jesus Christ may be uttered frequently, but somehow the *language of relationships* in the family does not match the *language of words*. It is possible in Christ to have a happy family.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The study concerns the Christian Marriage and Family life in the African Context. The African Christian is in constant conflict about which principles to use in marriage. Should he or she use the African marriage customs or the Western marriage customs? How can a distinction be made between the Western marriage customs and the Biblical Christian marriage customs? Christians in Africa must know that the Bible provides us with enough guidelines that can help one to start and maintain a good marriage and family life. Religion can be but an external form, a series of practices, a superficial avoidance of the obvious immoralities such as murder, adultery, robbery. It is sometimes a desperate effort to prove one's virtue. God is not content with niceness on the outside of life, Christians need to be serious with their relationship towards God. Biblical truth on marriage and family life should not be applied hypocritically, but honestly and concretely.

Christians in Africa should move towards a new understanding of the relationship between Christianity and culture. Christianity is not against 'all' of culture, it is against 'some' of culture. It needs real discernment to make a critical evaluation between what to leave out from the culture and what to retain. The processes of continuity and discontinuity have to be both applied wisely and critically. We cannot continue with all of culture and we can also not discontinue with all of culture. The aspects within the African culture which do not contradict Christianity should be maintained. The earlier presenters of the Gospel only applied the process of discontinuity when it came to the African culture and in so doing equated Christianity to their own culture. Christianity was also equated with civilisation. We should remember that there is no culture that is perfect before God. Through Christ, God wants to transform all cultures and ideologies.

Our understanding of the text is also influenced by our context. All theologies are contextualised, whether we are aware of it or not. Thus contextualisation as an important component in our presentation of the Gospel. Christians have to be true to the text as well as to the context. The question then comes, "What is contextualisation?" Some people equate contextualisation with liberalism and criticise the whole process on that basis. In my own argument, contextualisation is not equal to liberalism, where the text is only used to justify certain views without doing justice to the text. Conservative evangelical Christians tend to shy away from the concept 'contextualisation'. A look at different definitions of the term will help us to get clarification on the meaning of the term. "We understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation" (Kato, 1975:1217). "The process of conscientization of the whole people of God to the hermeneutical claims of the gospel" (Conn, 1978:42). "The translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations" (Nicholls, 1975:647). "Contextualization properly applied mean to discover the legitimate implications of the gospel in a given situation. It goes deeper than application. Application I can make or need not make without doing injustice to the text. Implication is demanded by a proper exegesis of the text (Peters, 1977:169). The above mentioned definitions demonstrate an approach of moving from the text to the context. Moving from the text to the context should not result in the context not being taken seriously. And those moving from the context to the text should also never ignore the fact that the Scripture does not need our assistance to speak the truth.

David J. Hesselgrave (1989:200) in his definition of contextualisation says, "Contextualisation can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture and that it is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential context. Contextualisation is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologising, Bible translation, interpretation and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian institution; church planting and

growth; church organization; worship style-; indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out of the Great Commission". There is no area in the life of the Christian where the Bible does not give guidance and direction. Thus in this thesis I made every attempt to use the Scripture as God's Word that speaks to the whole world today.

The issue of God's revelation must also be taken seriously. Christians must acknowledge the fact that God has spoken to people even before the coming of Christianity. God's General Revelation is real. Romans 1:18-32 is clear about General Revelation. God's judgement on people will also include the time before they heard Christianity, because they had the knowledge of Him (Romans 1:18-20). Traditional marriage and family customs cannot all be thrown away as if they do not have any truth in them. Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness". This Scripture implies that people are suppressing God's truth. God is going to punish them on the basis of their disobedience. Why being punished because of disobedience if they did not know anything about God? They knew God on the basis of His General Revelation.

It is possible for a Christian in Africa to have a happy marriage and Christian life on the basis of biblical truth. It is not the Western culture that can help us to have happy homes, but God through His Spirit.

GLOSSARY

Animism

General belief in spiritual beings.

Bridewealth

The gift(s) that are exchanged at marriage.

Celibacy

Religiously motivated commitment to life long abstention from sexual relations.

Circumcision

In the case of male it refers to the removal of all or part of the penis foreskin.
In the case of female it refers to the removal of some or all of the external genitalia.

Conjugal

Means the marital unit, the husband-and-wife relationship.

Consanguine

Means of the same blood, or biologically connected.

Contextualise

Creating of "Christian culture" which reflects both the universality of the gospel and the particularity of the human environment.

Continuity

Process whereby traditional customs and beliefs are carried over into Christianity with little or no change.

Covenant

Hebrew word is *berith* and means treaty, alliance or league.

Culture

Learned ways of behaving and adapting.

Dark continent

Africa as viewed by the nineteenth and twentieth century missionary. It meant without religion and sound morals.

Discontinuity

Process whereby traditional customs and beliefs are not carried over into Christianity.

Dualism

Any philosophical system that explains all phenomena in terms of two distinct principles, such as mind and matter or good and evil.

Elopment

The process whereby the prospective wife is 'stolen' (*okuvaka*) from her parents' home. She is then regarded as a wife without any payment of 'bridewealth'.

Extended Family

A nuclear family linked by a common ancestry to other kin relations or more nuclear families that live together or near each other.

Herero

A tribe in Namibia.

Hieroglyphics

A script devised by the ancient Egyptians. It was one of the most important systems of writing in the ancient world.

Hieroglyphs

A picture like symbols employed in hieroglyphic writing.

Homosexuality

Behaviour involving sexual relations with a member of the same sex.

Identity

Sameness as distinguished from change or difference. It deals with the question, "Who Am I?".

Initiation

Process by which an individual formally changes his role or status in society.

Monogamy

Form of marriage in which a person has only one spouse at a time.

Nuclear Family

Married parents living together with their children who are related to them by blood or adoption.

Okuvaka

Otjiherero word which means 'to steal'.

Omukaze

OtjiHerero word which means 'female'.

OtjiHerero

Language spoken by the *Herero* tribe of Namibia.

OvaHimba

Plural form of a tribe in the Northwest of Namibia. Singular form - Himba.

Ovitunja

Otjiherero word which means 'bridewealth' (see bridewealth).

Pagan

It derives from the Latin *pagamus* which means a villager or countryman. It means one who does not worship the God of the Christians.

Penance

Derived from the Latin *paenitentia* which means penitence or repentance. It refers to sorrow for sin and act of turning away from it.

Pictographs

A picture or picture sign used for communication.

Polyandry

It is a form of marriage in which a woman has two or more husbands.

Polygamy

It is a form of marriage that permits a person to have more than one husband or wife.

Polygyny

It is a form of marriage in which a man has two or more wives at the same time.

Premarital Purity

Having no sexual relationship before marriage.

Revelation

Disclosure offered by God or from the divine as distinguished from those attained by the human process of observation, experiment and reason.

Sacraments

Formal rite of the Christian church and a symbol of the spiritual reality.

Secularism

An ethical system founded on the principles of natural morality and

independent of revealed religion or supernaturalism.

Sodomy

Sexual connection *per anum* by man with a man.

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ABSTRACT

The African Christian is in search of biblical principles when it comes to marriage and family life. The purpose of this dissertation is to provide means by which Christians in marriage and family can come to understand better that part of life in which they spend most of their time and energy.

The dissertation has been divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. It gives an overview of the problem we are investigating. It also provides us with a historical background to the preaching of the Gospel in Africa. The argument in this chapter is that the missionaries were in total disregard of the African culture when they preached the Gospel. As a consequence the African converts rejected their own culture without any concrete understanding and accepted the culture of the missionaries that came with the Gospel. The result is that we are sitting with a Christianity in Africa that does not give answers to African problems, and in this regard, to marriage and family life.

Chapter 2 deals with the traditional marriage customs in Africa. This chapter provides us with the context. It gives us a picture of marriage and family life in traditional Africa.

Chapter 3 gives the Biblical theology for Christian marriage. The Bible as the Word of God plays a major role in this paper. There are issues that are particular to a specific culture, and there are principles that are applicable to all Christians. This chapter also serves as a reference to the chapters following it. The Biblical foundation that is established here comes back in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 gives answers to marriage and family life challenges. The approach in this chapter is to take the African context seriously and to apply the principle of continuity and discontinuity critically and responsibly. The Word of God has to triumph at the end. Chapter 5 deals with the family. The relationship between husband, wife and children is approached from a Biblical perspective. Leading a healthy family life is also a

sign of growth. Christians need to grow. We cannot just remain like babies and drink milk from year to year.

In Chapter 6 we make our concluding remarks and discuss the way forward for Christian marriage and family life in the African context. It is not optional for Christians to apply Biblical principles into their lives, it is an obligation. In this globalising and secularising world Christians need to spend more time in studying the Scripture so that they will know how to apply it in their daily lives.

My stance as an evangelical Christian in Africa is also evident in this research. I tried to be as objective as I could in my approach, but it is not possible to be totally objective. This statement should not serve as an excuse for any child of God to act irresponsibly, but we must try to make His truth known to all men.

OPSOMMING

Die verhandeling is in ses hoofstukke verdeel. Hoofstuk 1 is die inleiding. Dit gee 'n oorsig van die probleem wat ons ondersoek. Die hoofstuk voorsien ook 'n historiese agtergrond oor die prediking van die evangelie in Afrika. Die argument in hierdie hoofstuk is dat die sendelinge die Afrikakultuur totaal geïgnoreer het met die prediking van die Evangelie. As gevolg hiervan het die Afrika-Christen sonder enige goeie beoordeling sy kultuur verwerp en die sendeling se kultuur aangeneem. Nou sit ons met 'n Christenskap in Afrika wat nie antwoorde gee op die probleme van die Afrika-Christen nie. Vrae rondom die huwelik en die gesinslewe is nie voldoende beantwoord nie, want al die Afrikagebruike was net weggegooi. Kultuur en Openbaring kry ook aandag in hierdie hoofstuk. Kultuur kan nie totaal verwerp word nie, want daar is ook goeie dinge in die kultuur van die heiden. Wat toegepas moet word is 'n metode van kontinuïteit en diskontinuïteit. Oor openbaring redeneer die navorser in hierdie hoofstuk dat God Homself ook aan die Afrikavolke geopenbaar het voor die koms van die evangelie. Op grond van Romeine 1:18-32 word betoog dat God deur die algemene openbaring Homself en sy wil aan die Afrikavolke bekendgemaak het. As gevolg van hierdie algemene openbaring kan daar ook goeie gebruike rondom die huwelik en die gesinslewe in die Afrikakultuur aangetref word.

In hoofstuk 2 word die tradisionele huweliksgebruike in Afrika behandel. Die navorser sien dit as baie belangrik om al die gebruike rondom die Afrika kulturele huwelik te ondersoek voordat daar enige standpunt ingeneem kan word. Gebruike soos die 'bruidsprys', poligamie en die betekenis van die huwelik self word bespreek. Die betekenis van hierdie gebruike is baie maal verkeerd verstaan en het tot verkeerde gevolgtrekkings gelei.

Hoofstuk 3 gee 'n Bybelse teologie vir die Christelike huwelik. Die Bybel as die Woord van God speel 'n betekenisvolle rol in hierdie navorsing. Daar is dinge wat eie is aan 'n sekere kultuur, maar daar is beginsels wat van toepassing is op alle

Christene. Dus word aandag gewy aan daardie bo-kulturele huweliksbeginsels wat alle Christene oral temidde van verskillende kulture moet toepas.

In hoofstuk 4 word aandag gegee aan die Christelike huwelik in Afrika. Nadat ons die Afrika tradisionele huweliksgebruike in hoofstuk 2 en die Bybelse teologie oor die Christelike huwelik in hoofstuk 3 bespreek het, kontekstualiseer ons die Bybelse beginsels in hierdie hoofstuk. 'n Vergelyking tussen die Afrika kulturele huwelik en die Hebreeuse huwelik word ook getref en interessante ooreenkomste en verskille kom na vore. In hierdie hoofstuk redeneer die navorser dat sekere Afrika tradisionele huweliksgebruike nie teen die Skrif ingaan nie. Dit is dus moontlik om in Afrika te trou sonder om die Westerse gebruike wat saam met die sendelinge gekom het oor te neem.

Hoofstuk 5 handel oor die gesin. Die verhouding tussen man, vrou en kinders word bespreek. 'n Gesonde gesinslewe word in hierdie hoofstuk beklemtoon. Die begrip 'familie' of 'gesin' word breedvoerig bespreek om misverstande tussen die Afrika betekenis en die Westerse betekenis uit die weg te ruim en om sodoende 'n Afrika Christelike benadering te bevorder.

Hoofstuk 6 bevat enkele slotopmerkings en die weg vorentoe. 'n Christelike huwelik en gesinslewe is moontlik in Afrika en dus word die Afrika-Christen uitgedaag om die evangelie relevant te maak in sy of haar eie kultuur. Christene moet leer om krities na hulle eie kultuur te kyk.

Hierdie navorsing reflekteer ook die posisie van die navorser as 'n Bybelgelowige Christen.