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Christian education and sexual immorality in Pauline treaties

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Abstract

The Nation is saturated with infidelity, secularism, materialism and a general lack of respect for the sanctity of the home. Sexual pervasion is on the increase on daily basis, display of sexual contents pervades the society. Pornography defiles the mind of both adults and the youths by polluting their minds with impure and unholy thoughts; the sanctity and sacredness of sex is eroding in Africa where men desire to have sex with other men, a woman desire to lay with a fellow woman and humans even desires to copulate with animals. One of the greatest challenges is that the role of the Church as an agent of moral education and transformation in Nigeria socio-religious and political system is undermined. The aforementioned issues demonstrate the need for church intervention through Christian education. This paper looks at the role of the church through the agency of education to curb and provides lasting solutions to sexual immoral behaviours that have permeates the fabric system of the African society (especially, Nigeria). The writer adopts historical, descriptive and analytical methods of research for effective achievement of his goal. This paper discovers that, one, Nigeria is bedevilled with blatantly moral corrupt leaders who have nothing to offer in curbing the menace of immoral acts in the country; and secondly, the present situation in Nigeria with regards to fashion and the flaunting of flesh is but one more manifestation of the decay of this country. Therefore, religion plays a vital role in bringing sanity and sanctity to family moral values in the African society. From Christian education perspective, Christian institutions should design courses that will impact the society positively: spiritually, socially, economically and politically.

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1. Introduction

The moral decadences rambling around the world today had been brewing for decades, and its enormity had produced so huge confusion that even Christians find it difficult to resolve on which side of the fence they should pitch their tent- whether it should be with the liberally inclined exclusivist or the conservative separatist ^[1]. Morality is an essential aspect of the human life. Its relevance cuts across geographical, racial, sexual, religious, ideological or age barriers. As a result of this undeniable importance, it has become an important subject to religions. All religions are concerned with the promulgation of certain values, cultivation of specific virtues and the transformation of certain aspects of human behaviours ^[2]. Contemporary developments in technology and modern civilization, to a large extent have brought tottering and alarming changes to the way people reason, act, reach conclusions or make decisions. Indeed, no rationally minded individual would not, at least for once, and probably on only one aspect of morality, give a thought to the glaring downward slope of morality and the amoebic confusion of what to hold as the right or good, today ^[3]. We have had a traditional set of standards that have been challenged and found wanting or no longer fashionable. Now there don't seem to be any moral landmarks at all ^[4]. Owing to the advent of liberal and modernist views of

life, our world has become inundated with all kinds of teachings and actions. Today we are dealing with the confusion over marriage, sex, standards, and values; this is further complicated by the numerous religious and faith beliefs now on the world scene. It is this scenario that has led to the ever-increasing call for the acceptability of worldly perceptions in all spheres of life; consequently, there is a call for the recognition of same-sex marriages, same-sex families, and other strange doctrines. With this current trend in world affairs, concerted effort is now being made to reduce to the barest minimum the differences between men and women. This has brought about an unclear understanding of the purpose, position, and performance of the two sexes; it is now expected that the view that men and women are the same in nature and function should gain acceptance from all and sundry^[5].

Sexuality, like everything else created, has fallen into trouble, we are more vulnerable than ever, living in a society that crowds sexual innuendoes into every available space, whether billboard or office conversations. The whole society is reeling, we are burdened by “ruined families, staggered by millions of abortions, and terrified by a sexual epidemic. Sex apart from marriage is widely accepted in western society and frequently tolerated within the church. Cohabitation, an unmarried male and female living together with full sexual relationships, is so widespread that hardly anyone criticizes the practice today. Unquestioned acceptance of both premarital and extramarital sex has become a part of the culture’s values, reinforced by television, practiced by millions, and criticized by almost no one. For many, sex no longer is something that may be right or wrong; it is little more than a pleasurable way for two people to interact with each other^[6]. Collins further opines that:

Sexual intercourse apart from marriage is not the only issue that is widely accepted. Homosexual sex has been practiced for centuries and probably more common in Greek and Roman cultures than it is at present. As gay and lesbian liberation groups have become more visible and more active, overt homosexuality has become more accepted. Masturbation, probably the most common sexual behaviour apart from intercourse, is so prevalent that it rarely concerns sexual researchers and even has been promoted as a “means for achieving sexual health,” despite the fact this practice arouse a lot of guilt and anxiety, especially among boys and young men. The availability of internet pornography has made sexually explicit materials more available, often targeted to adolescent boys. Then there are the rare and more pathological forms of non- marital sexual behaviour, including the erotic exploitation of children, exhibitionism, rape, transvestism, bestiality (sex with animals), and voyeurism, each of which continues to attract the periodic attention of the media and mental-health professionals^[7].

Have we become obsessed with sex? It is a central issue in much of television, magazines, advertising, music, literature, the theatre, movies, art, and popular conversation. It often appears in business, education, politics, and the church. One would have to be a hermit to avoid the sexually arousing stimuli of contemporary culture. That which God created for our enjoyment and intimacy has become perverted. Sexual pervasion has become the major example of the sin and moral sickness that characterize modern human beings^[8]. Homes are constantly being attacked by social, economic, and intellectual forces. Unfortunately, the home has not yet perfected the strategy with which to meet these challenges.

Traditionally, Christians have made the religious and spiritual life of the family the supreme consideration; the parents were the child’s first and most important instructors in beginning Bible knowledge. The family altar was a very present reality in the home, and every child made contact there with the word of God. God’s command to the Israelites that His word should be taught to the children was quite literally obeyed (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Along with the school and the home, the church in its early days performed a teaching ministry. The pastor or evangelist was often at the same time a school teacher. Even when such was not the case, his conception of his duty was as that of one “apt to teach” the word. Today, however, the pastor is seldom a teacher in any formal sense^[9]. Hence, there is a need for Christian education and Moral Education.

2. Moral Education and Development

The word “moral” may mean the ability to distinguish between the right and the wrong. It is very much related to man conduct or the individuals’ behaviour. It concerns itself with goodness as well as badness of behaviour. Generally speaking, moral deals with good character, right or proper conduct or righteousness. Perhaps, moral education can be regarded as the process of guiding the character development of an individual in the society in order for an individual to be able to do what is right or just. Moral education is the process of developing a person’s moral character and values. Moral education aims to help people make informed and responsible decisions by teaching them about their rights, duties, and responsibilities. In other words, moral education can be regarded as the teaching or attempt to teach standards of right or wrong. It also concerns itself with the establishment of principles of right or wrong as well as their application to individual lives.¹⁰ Education generally enhances the development of good moral conduct in the society. It is also the responsibility of moral education to strengthen the idea of morality as an important foundation for social order. Moral rules are the same throughout the whole world. It is for this reason that moral rules are referred to as being general or universal. The reason for this is that morality throughout the whole world is against cheating, stealing, while morality generally, supports honesty, truthfulness, fair play, respect for elders, kindness, hardworking patriotism among others.¹¹ Gross posits that, at birth, we are amoral, lacking any system of personal values and judgments about right and wrong, but by adulthood, most of us possess morality. The relationship between morality and human nature has been debated by philosophers for thousands of years; humans are naturally good, but this natural goodness may be constrained and distorted by external factors^[12]. Only socio-biologist (such as Wilson, 1975) among modern day scientists agrees with this view of morality as innate. While we may like to believe that our actions are governed by higher moral principles, the reality is that the genes hold culture on a leash. Also quoting Bandura he asserts that: “the environment is only a potentiality not a fixed property that inevitably impinges upon individuals and to which their behaviour eventually adapts. Behaviour party creates the environment and the resultant environment in turn influences the behaviour.¹³ Through the give and take of interaction in relationships, moral development occurs. Dirks assert: Kohlberg’s theory provides a helpful basis for understanding the influences of community on moral growth. His research led to a scheme of moral development which proceeds

through at least five discernible stages (three levels) of reasoning concerning justice. In his most recent conceptualization, moral judgment development involves not only justice but includes a sense of caring and responsibility, or what is described as the virtue of agape. Community environments characterized both by justice and concern are significant for influencing moral reasoning to higher stages^[14].

A prominent context for nurturing mature moral reasoning is the Family. Its import is affirmed throughout the scripture. Never is the possibility entertained that the intimate community of the home may be replaced with other equally effective and acceptable options. The family is portrayed in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5-7; 11: 18-19) as the primary means for nurturing children. In the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 2 makes use of the family images to communicate a style of ministry in the body. In doing so, it suggests an ideal family environment in which there are warm loving relationships, gentleness, (v. 7-8), and an approach that helps each child to preserve his/her uniqueness's (v.12). While the scripture clearly indicates an essential role of the family in communicating faith content and life style, it also seems reasonable that the manner in which faith principles are communicated would have some relationship to moral maturity^[15].

A relaxed family setting in which warmth and acceptance are communicated is significant in moral maturity development. Such an environment contrasts with rushed lifestyles prevalent today. Parental use of the scripture to engender guilt in controlling children's behavior was not found to be associated with a climate in which moral reasoning is encouraged. Similarly, he claims that God's love is removed when conduct is inappropriate, and attempts to provoke the fear of God, and establish an environment which is not conducive of mature moral judgment. On the other hand, discipline which associates desired behavior with a loving God was determined to be related to development of moral maturity. Meanwhile, clear communication of standards of conduct while respecting the process of growth is related to moral maturity. Teaching God's standard in the process of daily living was likewise found to be associated with mature moral reasoning.¹⁶ The point of argument is that if at the family and community level moral principles are well understood and taught, it will in turn have a positive influence on the transformation of individuals and the nation as a whole. However, the objectives of morality include the following: (a) ensuring the survival of a society (b) restoring and promoting human dignity (c) being in conformity with man's rational nature. (d) doing things in line with the wish of the Supreme Being, God. It is worthy of note that God is the origin of morality when the nature of God himself is considered. He is full of moral, He, therefore, expects moral uprightness from His creatures – including man. If we agree that God is the origin of morality, then it is also logical for us to believe that the source of morality is basically located in the Holy Book of the two religions, Holy Bible and Quran. However, from the perspective of the traditional religion, morality arose from man's consciousness of belonging to the Supreme Being. For this reason, it could be concluded that moral actions are derived from religion as a result of which the two cannot be separated. The source of morality according to African religion is located in the Supreme Being, Divinities, Ancestors, societal customs and traditions (they are all regarded as the custodians of morality in African

Religion)^[17].

3. Christian Education and its Content

In the opening words of Hartley, in the novel *"The Go-Between"* The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there^[18]. How we understand the past and how we come to terms with our own memories, is an unpaid debt that all humans share; in studying the past, we have to learn how they did things there, being careful not to project our own values and social constructs onto other cultures, and recognizing that words can have different meanings and nuances^[19]. The history of education is a very long one, with ancient roots in the development of written language. Education is a process of transferring information and skills from one person to another. It encompasses the development of knowledge and skills in the learner, as well as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by the learner. Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth and continues throughout adulthood. According to Milton, "education is that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war"^[20]. Education includes formal education, semi-formal education, informal education and alternative education. Education is an important aspect of human life. It is the process by which a person acquires knowledge and skills that can be used for their future. The history of education is an interesting topic to study, as it has undergone many changes over the years. Olajide asserts that: Education should be seen beyond cognitive development and social environment of the learner. Rather, it is the preparation of life whereby an individual is equipped with skills about the established educational heritage, with consciousness of considering the integration of the present in preparing such an individual for the future, to enable him or her to be useful to himself (herself), to neighbors and community^[21].

However, education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and values. It also refers to the development of one's intellectual and moral character. The word education came from Latin word *educare*, which implies "to draw out," "to lead," or to 'guide' in essence, education recognises potentials in the recipients and it equally acknowledges the role of facilitators. The challenge of education is how to determine the extent of the potentials in the learners through the goal of education, which informs the value to be transmitted and the quality of the facilitators. From the above, one could conclude that education consists of organised body of knowledge communally accepted as valuable and employed to bring permanent positive change in the lives of participants and their community. It is a formidable tool for transmitting the values and virtues of society, and through it, transformation and sustenance of society is feasible^[22].

According to Astley and Crowder, Christian education is a religious education that is based on the principles of Christianity. It is the process by which people learn to become Christian and to be more Christian through their learning Christian beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions and dispositions to engage in Christian action and to be open to Christian experiences^[23]. The concept of Christian education has been around for a long time and was first introduced by the Roman Catholic Church; this is traced back to the time when the Portuguese traders had contact with Nigeria. In 1515, some Catholic missionaries set up a school in the Oba's palace in Benin for his sons and sons of his chiefs who had been converted to Christianity. The kind of education offered

to the pupils in the school was Christian oriented with its basis on the Scriptures. By 1571 the same Catholic missionaries visited Warri and established a school there. These schools established by missionaries were used as an instrument for the conversion of the young men. Hence, in those schools, Bible knowledge, Christian hymns, and catechism were taught to the pupils. The Bible was the master textbook and every subject, no matter how remote it was, had to be connected in some way to the holy book. The main purpose of education in the early stages was to teach Christianity with a view to converting all those who came within the four walls of the mission house. Throughout the period of exclusive mission activities in the south of Nigeria, the missionaries were busy teaching Bible knowledge in schools. The missionaries continued to give Christian knowledge to pupils in their schools even with the promulgation of the first education ordinance of 1882. The promulgation of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria on 27th December, 1889 did not stop the teaching of Christian education in the schools in the north of Nigeria. In the North, the CMS and the Sudan Interior Mission taught Christian education in schools and Bible knowledge was a compulsory subject which, if not passed, would cause a student not to be promoted to the next stage of his educational development [24].

Then in 1976, the government in Nigeria took away the many schools belonging to the missions and made them public schools. The resultant effect was that in some states in the Northern part of Nigeria, Christian Religious Knowledge ceased being taught in their schools. Also those who taught Christian education in many States were persecuted in different ways. Despite the fact that "once a subject is accepted into the curriculum it tends to stay there," which some have referred to as "curriculum inertia," Christian education has been frequently treated with contempt. Not only was it deemphasized, but academic attainment in the subject assumed prominence over and above moral character emphasis. In pursuit of rapid scientific and technological development, more emphasis was given to science and science-related subjects without a matching stress on character development [25]. No wonder the generality of human race is faced with social vices and evil. S.O. Gudigbe has this to say about education:

Education without the true knowledge of God is like yeast without sugar. Without religious knowledge we can only produce academic devils. As a noble man once said: "educate men without religion and you make them clever devils." It is evident in our society today that people in authority like the politicians and academicians have disappointed many people who confide in them because of their moral laxity and godlessness [26].

Nigeria as a nation includes in her educational curriculum: Christian education in the national policy on education of 1977 section (II) which stated that, "apart of unity which will be made available for religious instruction, no child will be made available for religious instructions which is contrary to the wishes of his/her parents [27]. Based on this educational policy, religious knowledge have been playing its role in training children and bringing children up socially, physiologically and morally which has brought the term 'knowledge of God' to the student. Ilori citing Ogunsola opines, "man is both body and soul, both reason and feeling, both spiritual and social. These pairs of his nature should be covered by subjects included in the school curriculum of any

grade. These disciplines of mind as well as the body are worthy subjects over which proper care should be religiously exercised [28]. Ilori asserts that: Christian education finds its materials anywhere and everywhere. Hymns, prayers, poetry, painting, and sculpture-the themes of which are religious, objects and things of beauty in the natural world, personal problems, vocational problems, social problems of every sort, political problems, and economic problems are put into the curriculum of Christian education with a view to making it life-centred. Any product of the human spirit, no matter what realm of interest it represents, constitutes suitable material for the content of Christian education [29].

Christian education is always at the forefront of imparting lives with what is worthwhile due to its pedigree. In Nigeria, Christian community, as the agent of God on earth, recognised the pertinent relevance of education is transmitting Christian heritage and they had made remarkable efforts to achieve the goal. However, the impartation of formidable and sustainable education that would inculcate godly values and lifestyle must go beyond cognitive domain of learning, viable education should impart the whole of human body, soul, and spirit [30]. Christian education recognises that there are sources of spiritual inspiration and guidance outside the pages of the Scriptures; it gives the Bible supreme place. For the Christian, the Bible is the inerrant, inspired word of the eternal God, given to man to reveal to him his destiny, the plan of salvation, the Saviour, and the will of God. Christian education firmly holds that by the Bible the thought of men will be judge, the words of man will be rewarded, and the lives of men are to be guided. According to Christian education, the Bible is to man what the signal light is to the locomotive engineer, what the compass is to the mariner, and what the radio beam is to the air pilot. Hence, though the Bible teacher may use extra-biblical materials, the Bible will be his point of reference, and he will use such other materials only for the purpose of making the truth of the Bible clearer.

4. Family Life and Sex Education

Family life education is described as the educational effort to strengthen individual and family life through a family perspective. Other terms sometimes used to describe the same general content of family life education include sex education, human relations education, personal development, and life skills education etc. the purpose of family life education is to strengthen and enrich individual and family wellbeing. Family life education also aims to help people have meaningful social relationships in the contents of family and society. It helps to prepare young people for adulthood, and ageing. However, sex education on the other hand is described as "sexuality education," or "family life education" which means that it consists of education about all aspect of sexuality, including information about family planning, and reproduction. It also includes information about body image, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, value decision making, communication, relationships, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and how to avoid them.³¹ Traditionally, sex has been a very private and secretive activity. It is a powerful force for uniting people in a strong bond. Norman Shields asserts that, human sexuality is the capacity human beings have to create relationships between men and women or more precisely relationships between a man and a woman [32]. Human sexuality can be defined as the ways in which people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. This

would include their perception of themselves as male or female, and their capacity for erotic experiences and responses. Sexuality and the feelings associated with it do not start in adolescence and disappear at the age of retirement. It begins long before birth and continues up to the day a person dies.³³ Morality of sex is the combination of moral and ethical considerations that relate to human sexuality; morality of sex includes the attitudes and values related to gender identification, sexual orientation, procreation, and consent. The morality of sex of a culture are usually affiliated closely with the religion of that culture, which assign moral values to certain aspects of sexual expression, for example, the determination of whether rape, molestation, or adultery is morally wrong varies from culture to culture and is often tied to the level of influence Christianity has had on that region. In the Judeo-Christian worldview, the Bible has the final say on morality of sex and has been the standard for freest nations for the last two millennia^[34]. According to Soble, sexual morality generally is a hotly contested notion in ethics, central to this notion are the questions in what circumstance is it morally permissible to engage in sexual activity? Other concomitant questions are: with whom, when, for what purpose, with which body part, and for how long, are we supposed to engage in such act?^[35]

Sexuality is affected by social, cultural, spiritual and religious factors in addition to Physical structure, functioning, and appearance. Sex is the only way men and women come together to form a family or home out of which other human beings are born into and relate with one another. The sex gender is so important to life that we are constantly reminded of it in the clothes we wear, stories we tell or hear, novels, magazines, poetry, arts, occupations we belong to and serve. It is also expressed in sports and games, where we go to relax, in the schools, colleges and university, as well as music and drama. From these we realized that men are different from women but are closely related. The main reason for differences in the way men and women behave is as a result of gender specifications. We can also observe the gender differences everywhere in nature, for instance in animal life, plants and birds. Sex and sexuality are every day talk, but much of what we hear and say about it is inaccurate and most times confusing and misleading. There is need to understand the basic of sex and sexuality by sorting out facts from myths in order to enjoy our lives^[36].

5. The Bible and Human Sexuality

The Bible is constantly in the news. Pastors and popes, politicians and pundits regularly cite it as an unchallengeable authority on all sorts of issues, to undergird widely divergent points of view. Majority regularly cite the old book (Bible) about “family values,” most of which have to do with issues of sex and gender. In looking at the Bible, we need to realize that we are entering a foreign country. Its languages, cultures, and values, although in some ways apparently familiar because of the status of the Bible in Judaism and Christianity, differ in many ways from our own. Even the treatment of a universal human experience such as sex is culturally specific in biblical world. In the biblical past, as in foreign country, not only did they do things differently, they also spoke different languages, languages with distinct idioms, including those used for sex. One familiar biblical idiom for having sexual intercourse “knows”-“to know in the biblical sense,” as the phrase has it, means to have sex with. The Hebrew verb translated as “know” can, and usually does, refer to what we

would call intellectual knowledge, but more than a dozen times in the bible it has the sense of the intimate knowledge that occurs during sexual intercourse-“carnal knowledge.” So, after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the man (soon to be called Adam) “knew his wife Eve and she became pregnant, and gave birth to Cain^[37].”

Scripture tell us that God made man in his image and that he created ‘them male and female.’ The proper place to begin thinking about this issue (Human sexuality) is Genesis 2 as stated above, after giving clear instructions to Adam about his stewardship of the Garden, God concludes it is not good that Adam is alone (v.18). To prove this to Adam, God brings all the animals before him to name (v.19-20). Although this establishes his authority over the animals, it also served as an object lesson for Adam. He was the only creature of God truly alone. So, God creates the woman as his complement, his helper (v. 21-23)^[38]. Moses then offers a theological commentary on what God did with Adam and Eve (v. 24-25). First, God established the paradigm for marriage. The man is to leave his family with the conscious understanding that he is establishing a new family unit. Second, that means “to cleave” (like glue) to his wife. Third, in doing the separating from family and the unqualified commitment to his wife, he and his wife will “become one flesh.” The concept does symbolize the sexual intercourse that physically unites the two human beings, but it also symbolizes the margin of two personalities, male and female, into a complementary whole. Their personalities, their idiosyncrasies, and their uniqueness all remain; they do not cease. Instead, these two totally different human beings merge into a perfect complement where both-now together- serve God in their integrity^[39].

Starting with Adam and Eve, the Bible is full of stories and laws about sex. There are provocative narratives involving marriage, adultery, divorce, rape, and prostitution; decrees are made on what kinds of sex are permissible and which are not and how breaking those decrees is to be punished. Shields posit that:

Sexuality, like every other aspect of life, was damaged by the fall. As a result our experience of it today is not, or is not fully what the creator intended it to be. As Jesus said in relation to divorce-‘it was not so at the beginning’ (Matthew 19:8). This is not to say, however, that the Scripture regard sexuality as inherently evil. Rather it presents it as a gift from God to be honored and used as intended and in a way that contributes to His glory^[40].

Within the Scripture, sexual intercourse is intended to be confined to marriage. It is true that the Bible does little to define marriage, but sex apart from the marital commitment was condemned.⁴¹ Scripture sets clear boundaries within which sexual activity can legitimately take place. They make clear that sex urge is not an appetite to be allowed to control us as our desire dictates this is because man is not a mere animal, but a rational and moral being, he is to be governed not by his biological drives but by moral laws. His powerful sex urges must, therefore, be regulated by divinely given principles and commands^[42].

6. Sexual Immorality in Pauline Treaties

“Enjoy life with the woman you love,” advises the author of Ecclesiastes. Here and there the Bible celebrates human love and marital sex, especially for its reproductive results. But the Bible is more famous, even infamous, for its prohibitions and condemnations of what in its writers’ views was sex with the wrong people or at the wrong time^[43]. In the scripture the

marriage of a man and a woman and intimate physical and psychological relationships it entails are always upheld. It is even paralleled with and used to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church (1 Cori. 7:4, Eph. 5:22-32, 1 Tim. 4: 3, Heb. 13:4). Marriage is presented as a sacred or holy covenant between a man and a woman, a commitment they give to each other in 'troth' (truth or honesty) and with the serious intention of living together as man and wife in a permanent relationship. They become 'betrothed' or bound to each other by solemn promises. That relationship is the one context for sexual intercourse that has the approval of scripture, relationships, like those created by fornication, adultery, harlotry and homosexuality are different and do not have biblical or divine approval (cf. Rom. 1:26-27). Sexual intercourse is only legitimate within marriage; in this exclusive relationship a man and a woman joined in marriage become one (Gen. 2:27, Matt. 19:5etc). Scripture (Lev. 18) assumes, for example, that a woman's nakedness belongs to her husband. He alone has the right to have intercourse with her^[44].

In the Roman world in which Paul ministered adultery, fornication, immorality, impurity prostitution, divorce and homosexual practices were common. The emperor, Julius Caesar is reputed to have been what is now called 'bi-sexual' - 'every woman's man and every man's woman!' The fact that folk with a background of these sins had been converted and brought into the churches (1 Cor. 6:11) made it necessary for him to speak firmly about such sins. He had to warn the converts against continuing with or falling into practices, which could mar their lives and damage the witness of the churches. Writing to the people at Corinth, he dealt with a disturbing case of incest such as did not even occur among pagan people (1 Cor. 5:11). This was so serious that the offender was to be executed from and denied the benefits of Christian fellowship in order that his sinful nature might 'be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord' (5.5). In verses 9-11 of the same chapter he instructed his readers to avoid close fellowship with professing believers, who indulged in these and the other sins he has mentioned. In the next chapter he again warned against prostitution and all forms of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Since immorality was very common he even added a plea in favour of marriage and against the single state he himself preferred (1 Cor. 7:2, cf. verses 26, 32-35). Each of Paul's four lists of sins begins with sexual immorality, which must have been the major danger to the early believers. Every form of sexual immorality-harlotry, fornication, impurity or sexual vice and debauchery (unrestrained sexual activity or licentiousness) - was rejected as activity of the sinful nature (Gal. 5:19). Perverted use of the human body, including male and female homosexual acts, is specified as unacceptable and evil (Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 6:9b)^[45].

Paul extended the use of Greek term for fornication to cover all sinful sexual activity; he dealt with the problem particularly in writing the Corinthians who faced a society permeated with sexual religion and the sexual sins of a seaport.⁴⁶ The citizen of Corinth were known for their sexual immorality, and this practice of immorality had come into the Corinthian church, perhaps these new Corinthian Christians had supposed that having put faith in Christ and received salvation they could now behave in any way they pleased. If so, they would naturally begin to fall back into their old

wicked customs. One kind of sexual immorality that was present among the Corinthian Christians was so bad that even the ungodly citizens of Corinth didn't do it! That is, a man who called himself a Christian was living in adultery with his own stepmother! (Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20). But there was another thing almost as bad: all the other Christians were tolerating this immorality; they didn't even care about it. That such a sin was present among them didn't seem to bother them at all^[47].

In his address to the Thessalonica Christians (I Thessalonians 4:3-8) the first instruction designed to produce greater holiness is abstinence from sexual immorality. Paul called his readers to avoid it, implying the need for exercising self-discipline, enabled by God's Spirit; Christians are to avoid and abstain from any and every form of sexual practice that lies outside the circle of God's revealed will, namely adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, homosexuality, and other perversions. The Thessalonians lived in a pagan environment in which sexual looseness was not only practiced openly but was also encouraged. In Greek religion, prostitution was considered a priestly prerogative, and extramarital sex was sometimes an act of worship. However, to a Christian the will of God is clear: holiness and sexual immorality are mutually exclusive; no appeal to Christian liberty can justify fornication. Paul emphasized the same truth in a positive way by expanding on this prohibition. One avoids sexual immorality by learning how to control his own body with its passions; self-control in response to one's sexual desires, Paul taught, could and must be learned. Christians are not the victims of circumstances or their fleshly passions, sexual desire can be controlled by the Christian through God's power. Paul did not specify how to control one's passions; he implied that there may be several ways but the Christian should choose a method that is both holy and honorable. That is, the action taken as an alternative to sexual immorality must be behavior that is set apart to the Lord in its motivation and recognised by others as intrinsically worthy of respect (cf. I Corinthians 6:13-20). Each Christian is responsible for his/her own body and behavior, not his/her neighbor's (cf. I Corinthians 10:13). Every young Christian, like the Thessalonians, should learn how to deal appropriately with sexual temptations^[48].

Sexuality pervades all of life and ranges from mild feelings of pleasure about human relationships to sensual lovemaking and stimulating orgasms; sex involves intimacy and intense communication even in the absence of physical contact. According to Smedes, sex is an exciting desire, sometimes a melancholy longing, to give ourselves in trust to another, an urge towards closeness and expression of a deep personal relationship with someone else^[49]. When sex deviates from God's perfect plans for human beings, it may bring temporary pleasure, but ultimately it is destructive; it destroys intimacy and communication, is self-centered, and often expresses a desire to manipulate, control or hurt another person. Perhaps this is why the Bible writers so soundly condemn fornication (which usually refers to premarital sex), adultery (sexual relations with a person other than one's spouse), and other forms of sex outside of marriage; these pleasures are enjoyable, but the pleasure is fleeting because outside of marriage deviates from God's plan for what ultimately is good for human beings.⁵⁰ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Hebrews 13:4).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Bible addresses human sexuality from a holistic perspective of God's intention and design. In contrast to both pagan sex rituals and modern obsession with sex, the Bible places sex within the total context of human nature, happiness, and holiness. The gift of sexual activity is consistently located only within the context of the marital covenant; joined to each other within this monogamous covenant, the man and the woman may be naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). The consistent witness of the biblical writers is that sexual relations are limited to this covenant relationship. All forms of extramarital sexual activity are condemned, including premarital sex (fornication) and adultery (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 22:22; I Corinthians 6:9-10). The Bible presents sexual deviance as intentional rejection of God's authority as creator and Lord (Romans 1:18-25). As Paul warns, those who practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Both the Old Testament and New Testament writers warned that the people of God are to remain untainted and uncorrupted by such sins^[51].

Sexuality is one of God's good gifts, and the source of much human happiness. At the same time, once expressed outside its intended context of marital fidelity, it can become one of the most destructive forces in human experience. Marital sexual love is expressed in the intimacy of sexual union and the marital act of conjugal union is the source of both pleasure and procreation. Sexuality contains the potential to hurt and damage, therefore, sexual union outside marriage is not for Christians; sexuality is treasured but that does not mean that all the potential of each person must be fulfilled. Circumstances-being a slave for example (I Corinthians 7:21) – will often impose painful limits. Yet within those limits all Christians are free to understand their lives as a calling from God to be lived to his glory. A single life can also be accepted as a gift from God and lived to the full within the Christian community^[52].

Sexual immorality defiles not only the human body but also God's temple, because the believer's body is the temple of God^[53] Christians belong to Christ both physically and spiritually. Believers make up Christ's body here on earth, and our physical bodies are as much part of his body as our soul. So when one indulges in sexual immorality, it is as if we are making Christ commit immoral acts (6:15). Paul calls on Christian to flee from sexual immorality (6:18a) Christians should respond as did Joseph (Gen.39:12) when he was faced with immorality,^[54] the best way to deal with sexual temptations is to run away and avoid them. He reminds them of the folly of giving in to sexual temptation by pointing out that this is a sin that affects one's own body (6:18b). Believers need to remember that they belong to Christ, since he paid for their lives with his blood; that blood redeemed both their bodies and their souls, and now they must glory and honour God with their bodies (6:20)^[55].

The church should preach a message of moral and spiritual regeneration. The God we serve is a God of truth, righteousness, holiness and justice (Lev. 19:2; Exodus. 22:8; Isaiah 33:15; Micah 6:8). The Christian message must focus on the moral development of the human person. It is only through the experience of new birth that a person is saved from the world's social vices (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:17). The Nigerian church needs to balance preaching on prosperity, blessing, healing and miracles with self-sacrifice, perseverance, holiness and righteousness. Paul's strong response to immorality teaches a very practical lesson-church discipline must sometimes be administered for the benefit of the church, as well as for the correction of the person concerned. Its aim must always be to cure the one disciplined of the evil and to prevent the evil from spreading. While discipline must never be done in a spirit of hostility, a congregation that ignores immorality will end up with a sick and corrupted church^[56].

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