



BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE FOR BUILDING MUTUAL MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA WITH A PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HONA CULTURE

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Cite this article:

Victor Umaru (2024), Biblical Principles of Marriage for Building Mutual Marital Relationships in Contemporary Africa with a Particular Reference to Hona Culture. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 7(4), 172-186. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-COQLS62I

Manuscript History

Received: 17 Aug 2023

Accepted: 13 Nov 2023

Published: 23 Oct 2024

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ABSTRACT: *Modern Africans, especially Hona people, have attitudes towards marriage that are more akin to those of the Europeans of the same generation than their parents or grandparents, especially regarding the start of a relationship. Although some antiquated practices, like polygamy and the bride price, are a reminder that contemporary Africans still make an effort to stay connected to their history despite how the world has changed. Despite this assertion, one can gradually see the sudden disappearance of the cultural marriage pattern among the Hona people. The discursive and analytical approach used in this research to close this existential gap typically refers to the use of language as a social practice and established methods of generating the meanings of phenomena, knowledge, and reality, as well as the networks connecting them. Through this method, the researcher examines how meanings are created in human contact about the biblical guidelines for marriage. Christianity (religion) in Africa is progressively starting to rule Hona and some parts of Africa; the argument made in this paper is that biblical standards for marriage must be accepted among all races on the continents. The study's findings reveal that marriage is instituted and invented by God; attached is the manual on how it can be operated for the beneficiary's benefit. This manual is the Bible, available in almost every Christian home. If strictly adhered to its teachings, there will be no incidences of malfunctioning. Christian homes and marriages are having issues because the Manufacturer's prescription is not followed. Therefore, the study pitched its tent that if marital relationships work, there is a need to understand the concept of "Oneness" different from sameness. Finally, there is a need to understand how the mind is structured. For marriage to be sustained, the paper recommends that submissiveness and love are non-negotiable traits between couples.*

KEYWORDS: Biblical principles, Marriage, Building mutual marital relationships, Contemporary Africa, Hona culture, Submission, Love.



INTRODUCTION

The 1960s saw the birth of independence on the African continent, with most conquered countries becoming independent states in succession (Yao-Kouamé 2010: 1). This period also brought about changes that continued even after independence, affecting political, economic, and sociocultural aspects of African society. The institution of marriage, which forms the foundation of traditional African social structure, has begun to reinvent itself, adapting to the contemporary world. The new generation of Africans born after independence is raised in a globalised modern world, not directly experiencing colonialism. The mass media is the primary tool for promoting cultural globalisation between the first and third worlds, with the term “Westernization” used to highlight the influence of the wealthy industrialised world on less developed countries’ cultures (Yao-Kouamé 2010: 1). This explains why many modern Africans, especially Hona people, have attitudes towards marriage more similar to those of Europeans of the same generation than their parents or grandparents, especially regarding the start of a relationship. Although some antiquated practices, like polygamy and the bride price, are a reminder that contemporary Africans still make an effort to stay connected to their history despite how the world has changed. However, one can gradually sense the sudden disappearance of the cultural marriage pattern among the Hona people.

The study examines the intersection of traditional African marital values, specifically within the Hona culture, and biblical principles regarding marriage and how these principles guide and enhance mutual relationships in modern African society. The biblical perspective on marriage, frequently regarded as a holy union, includes values such as love, respect, fidelity, and the submission of both spouses to one another. These values are found throughout the Bible in several texts and can be used as a roadmap for establishing long-lasting marriages. Marriage holds significant cultural, social, and religious importance in contemporary Africa. It is a foundation for the familial structure, community cohesion, and personal fulfilment. However, in the face of evolving societal norms and influences, there is a growing need to bridge traditional values with modern challenges in marital relationships.

The discursive and analytical approach used in this research to close this existential gap typically refers to the use of language as a social practice and established methods of generating the meanings of phenomena, knowledge, and reality, as well as the networks connecting them. The core principle of the approach is that language, and other semiotic systems construct knowledge and reality. Through this approach, the researcher examines how meanings are created in human contact concerning the biblical guidelines for marriage. Given that Christianity (religion) in Africa is progressively starting to rule Hona and some parts of Africa, the argument made in this paper is that biblical standards for marriage must be accepted among all races on the continents.



Understanding the Concept of Marriage in Contemporary Africa

Marriage in contemporary Africa is multifaceted, blending traditional values with modern influences. Africa's urbanisation has significantly impacted marriage and family structures, changing traditional practices and values. Urban environments prioritise individual freedom, personal aspirations, and independence, influencing marriage choices. While there is diversity across different regions and cultures, several common themes prevail.

First, historically, arranged marriages were common in Africa, but now, many Africans have the freedom to choose their partners based on affection and compatibility. This shift from arranged to love-based marriages is a global trend, particularly in Africa, where individuals increasingly choose their life partners (Baloyi 2022:1). Factors contributing to this shift include higher education levels, exposure to diverse cultures, economic independence, changing social norms, and women's empowerment. This agrees with the opinion of Nwobodo (2022: 168): "Africa's traditional culture, values and practices have withered and are still withering through well programmed western spells, storms and cultures that have pervaded through almost all facets of human life and activities." However, aspects of arranged marriages persist, such as family influence, blending traditions, and cultural variations. Some couples blend aspects of arranged marriages with elements of love-based marriages, focusing on mutual affection and compatibility.

Polygamy is becoming less common due to social restrictions and changing social norms. It is often seen as infringing on gender and economic realities, and social restrictions have been enacted in some African countries to promote gender equality and protect individual rights, particularly women and children. Many legal systems now recognise monogamous unions, offering legal protection and rights to spouses and children. Socioeconomic changes, such as urbanisation and increased education, have influenced younger generations to question and reevaluate traditional practices, including polygamy.

Second, education and employment have significantly influenced marriage in contemporary Africa, particularly in the timing and decisions surrounding marriage. Higher education offers personal growth, skill development, and career opportunities, sometimes leading to delayed marriages. Career goals often precede early marriage, with both men and women focusing on establishing themselves professionally before considering marriage. Education and employment provide financial independence, allowing individuals to make more informed choices about their life partners and the timing of marriage. Educated individuals, especially women, have more autonomy in choosing their partners and negotiating the terms of their marriages. Education often broadens perspectives, reevaluating traditional gender roles and marital expectations, influencing the desire for more egalitarian and companionate marriages (Schultz 1993:694-734). It also raises awareness of rights within marriage, influencing decisions about when and whom to marry.

Third, marriage ceremonies in Africa are a rich and diverse celebration that blends traditional rituals with contemporary practices. Traditional rituals include ceremonial practices for unity and blessings, as well as cultural symbols like the dowry exchange or bride price. Modernisation has led to incorporating modern elements like music, fashion, and technology, with couples personalising their ceremonies to their unique identities. For Nwobodo (2022:168), "...African family patterns are slowly but progressively being altered as a result of the process of modernisation which is exhibited through trends like urbanisation. Family



patterns that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually being altered and substituted by modern values.” However, one may not totally jettison modernity because it has also played a significant role in documenting and sharing these events, connecting them with a broader audience, and preserving memories (cf. (Madukwe and Madukwe, 2018:44-46). Marriage ceremonies are communal events, bringing together extended family, friends, and the broader community to celebrate the union and strengthen social bonds. They also symbolise transition and the continuity of cultural heritage and values across generations. Family ties are highly valued, and marriages often involve the consent and involvement of extended families and the community. Involving families and communities ensures the passing down of cultural values, traditions, and heritage to the next generation within the context of marriage and family life (Nwobodo, 2022:168-7).

Fourth, women’s empowerment in Africa transforms gender within marriages and families, giving them greater autonomy and influence in choosing partners and shaping family decisions. This empowerment is based on freedom of choice, reduced pressure, and education as an empowerment tool. Empowered women gain financial independence through access to education and employment, contributing to their agency in making choices within their marriages. They also contribute equally to marriage decision-making, which influences their choices regarding family matters, children’s education, and household management (cf. OECD and NEPAD, 2007; Longwe, 2000).

Increased awareness and advocacy for women’s rights by NGOs, governments, and grassroots movements have changed societal attitudes. However, cultural resistance persists, particularly in rural areas or marginalised communities, on gender-based issues like bride price, domestic violence, and unequal power persist in some areas. These include the practice of paying the bride price, which perpetuates the perception of women as commodities and creates financial burdens on the groom’s family. Unequal power persists in some households, with men holding more decision-making authority in family matters and finances. Access to resources is also a challenge, with disparities in education and economic independence hindering women’s empowerment and equal opportunities.

Fifth, globalisation significantly influences perceptions and expectations of marriage in Africa, mainly through television, movies, social media, and the Internet. This exposure to diverse relationship models, romantic ideals, and lifestyle choices shapes individuals’ perceptions and expectations regarding love and marriage. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and dating apps offer glimpses into different relationships and societal norms, influencing how individuals perceive and pursue relationships. Global media portrays romanticised ideals of love and relationships, which influence aspirations and set new standards for romantic partnerships. Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives through media alters traditional views on love, romance, and partner selection, impacting individuals’ relationship expectations. The emphasis on individual aspirations and independence challenges traditional collective values, influencing individuals to prioritise personal goals over familial or societal expectations. Despite acculturation and globalisation, many communities strive to preserve their cultural heritage, including traditional marriage customs.



Marriage in Hona Culture

In traditional African culture, the bride price is “a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom’s people to those of the bride for their care over her and for allowing her to become his wife” (Muyambo 2019). According to Sehaba (2013), “It unites two families and grants the union legal status.” The primary components of the bride price are gifts and money given to the desired woman’s family by the suitor’s family. It shows how seriously the groom is treating the woman he is courting.

Hona people are found in Gombi Local Government in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Usually, marriages are initiated by a father who wants to arrange for his son’s marriage at a young age. It begins by presenting 20 heads of grain to the father of a baby girl through a friend, asking that his son be permitted to be the girl’s suitor. This is an account of the pre-marriage ceremony among the Hona people. If the girl’s father objects, he must return the present; otherwise, he consults the mother. In turn, the mother consults her family, and the gift is returned if they object. If the suit is accepted, the girl’s parents will give the boy’s parents some beer in exchange, and if it is not, the boy’s father will give the girl’s parents a goat and put a bracelet on his future daughter-in-law. The youngster is forced to provide his agricultural services to his fiancée’s parents as he gets older, and he remains in this bondage until he takes the bride to his own house. Substantial presents must be given to the girl’s parents as she approaches adolescence. Five to ten hoes, a cloth roll, ten pots of beer, two chickens, some groundnut and mahogany oil, and other items, all payable to the girl’s father, make up these gifts. To the girl’s maternal uncles, separate gifts of a hoe, a chicken, and three pots of beer are sent. The girl’s father then applies mahogany oil all over her body. The kid must build a unique cottage for the girl’s mother during the following dry season with the help of his father. With its beehive form and distinctive embellishments constructed of bands of multicoloured grass, this cottage stands out in any compound. The peak of the hut is always topped with a pot.

The “Jan Bai” ritual is held when this task is finished. The young suitor is dressed in a skirt of leaves held up by a fabric band. His buddies accompany him to the girl’s house, and his father gives him a crimson cap, a bow, a quiver, and a whip. A dance and feast are held, with beer from the girl’s father and the three goats from the boy’s father. The bridegroom’s friend’s wife had applied mahogany oil to the girl in the morning.

Following the feast, the boy’s family publicly demands “their wife.” The bride, dressed in a gown, is brought to the bridegroom’s house on the shoulders of a friend. The young pair slumbers together there. Sexual activity is not permitted now, though, as the girl might not yet be in puberty. The following day, she returns to her parent’s house while donning two gowns and her fiancé’s red cap. The bridegroom follows her, and from that point on, for two or even three years, he spends the night with her while returning every morning to his own home. During this time, the young couple, who are still just boys and girls, refrain from having sexual contact. If the girl becomes pregnant, the guy must offer the girl’s parents a gown and a goat, with the goat being slaughtered at the shrine of a local deity. The girl’s parents would suffer terribly if this were not done. The bridegroom tries to spend most of the weeknights with his wife, but this is not always possible because their homes are often up to 10 kilometres apart. Every Hona woman, whether married or single, is vulnerable to the overtures of men or youngsters at all times in the hopes of receiving immediate or eventual favours. As a result, although still a young bride, she might conceive a child with someone



who wants to make her someday his wife. If this happens, a professional abortionist is hired since, in Europe, children born as a result of any violation of custom are treated similarly to illegitimate offspring: bastards.

The bridegroom is still at her parents' beck and call as long as the bride still resides at home, mainly if he works in agriculture. However, the bridegroom can bring the bride to his household after two years. Not, though, without further charges. A goat, gown, and calabash of corn are sent by the bridegroom's father to the bride's father after the first year, along with a basket of grain to the bride's mother (who then delivers it to her brothers). The bride and her mother later construct a granary at the bridegroom's residence for the bride to utilise later. A ritual of capture by the bridegroom's buddies will occur the following year during the dry season. The bride, however, is reclaimed by the bride's mother at the residence of the bridegroom because she is still too young to be a wife. The bride is subsequently let to leave again but is later apprehended again. She subsequently moves in with her husband permanently as a full-fledged wife.

Even once the bridegroom has successfully welcomed her into his home, he must not take it easy. Many fans will be willing to take her into their homes if she is a beautiful woman. They go to the woman's father, who is open to receiving additional gifts (such as gowns) if the woman wants to find a new husband. The dissuading factor is that if a wife has not given birth to a child by her husband, the man who proposes to marry her must pay back the husband's pre-marriage expenses. This is a tricky situation because the new husband would have to pay back payments made (by the former husband) over a long time in a lump sum. If the woman has given birth, no request for the bride price's reimbursement is made because the kid is seen as compensation. However, the mother is protected from entering into a second marriage because the child stays with the father or, at the very least, returns to the father.

Arranged marriages are a significant part of the Hona culture, involving familial involvement and the practice of bride price. Parents and elders hold authority in arranging marriages, considering factors like family reputation, compatibility, and economic status. The bride price tradition symbolises respect, commitment, and recognition of the bride's worth within her family and community. Marriage ceremonies are significant cultural milestones characterised by rich traditions, communal celebrations, and symbolic rituals. These ceremonies symbolise the union of the couple and the merging of their families, carrying deep cultural and spiritual significance. Traditional dances, prayers, blessings, and symbolic gestures are integrated into the ceremonies for unity and the beginning of a new familial bond. Communal festivities are held during marriages as social ties and transmitting customs, values, and traditions from one generation to another. Adaptations and modern influences lead to a fusion of tradition and modernity and changes in younger generations' lifestyles, tastes, and preferences. Globalisation and exposure to diverse influences also alter ceremony over time.

Women in the Hona culture held roles in household management and economic contributions. However, increasing access to education offers women more opportunities beyond traditional roles, empowering them to pursue careers, entrepreneurship, or professional paths. The Hona culture is transitioning due to globalisation, urbanisation, and changing generational perspectives. Globalisation has increased connectivity and exposure to diverse cultures, potentially leading to adaptations in marriage practices. Urban settings introduce new lifestyles and values that influence younger generations, impacting their



approach to traditional marriage customs. Generational shifts are also occurring, with younger generations exposed to modern ideas and education viewing certain Hona traditions differently. This led to adaptations or modifications in their approach to marriage customs.

Sociocultural norms and values are also changing, with education and exposure to diverse perspectives influencing them. Hona traditions undergo gradual modifications or adaptations as the people find ways to integrate new ideas while preserving the essence of their cultural heritage. Balancing the retention of cultural identity with the acceptance of modern ideas presents a challenge, requiring thoughtful adaptation while safeguarding core traditions. The Hona community is committed to safeguarding traditional marriage customs and is crucial in upholding and transmitting cultural practices.

The Biblical Principles of Marriage

Arguably, the Hona people are predominantly Christian. Despite their rich culture regarding marriage and other issues, one can pinpoint some practices that are not biblical, which sometimes leads to polygamy or divorce. Therefore, presenting the suitable marriage model, as God designed it from the Bible, will help restore sanity in various homes among the Hona people and modern Africa.

In Matthew 19:3, Jesus was asked what appears to be a technical question about marriage problems and how they can be solved. Jesus' approach to the question is worthy of note. He believes that the genesis of marriage needs to be studied repeatedly. His responses in verses 4-6 will solve, resolve and dissolve every problem in any marriage. His answer was offered to the Pharisees and every generation of men ever since as His standpoint and the panacea for every need in marriage. Jesus' referral to the 'beginning' presupposes that before any theory is to be propounded or any suggestion to be proffered, reading between the lines about what was done and said at the 'beginning' is crucial. The study of the Bible, which contains the origin and the original principles of operation issued from the 'beginning,' cannot be overemphasised (Kusi & Ashley, 2015).

A close look at the passage of Matthew 19:4-6 portrays Jesus quoting directly from the book of Genesis 1 and 2. Therefore, a little review of those chapters is paramount. In verse 4 of Matthew 19, Jesus talks about creation (Gen. 1:26-27); this implies that, without a general knowledge about the anatomy of man and woman, marriage will not work. Quoting Him, "Haven't you read..." that the Creator "made them male and female at the beginning." He might have expected them to have read Genesis 1:26-28. This is the genesis of man. As some theories and epochs claimed, man has not evolved from anything. The initiation of the idea and its implementation began and was executed by God alone. Both males and females were created from the deliberate plan of the Creator.

In this passage, Jesus' reference to the Pharisees reveals that the trouble in every area of man's life today (not only in marriage) is because of the deviation from the instruction and the principles of operation as stated in the Bible. He (Jesus) also gave guiding principles for the operation of marriage as it was from the beginning (Gen. 2:24-25). Jesus made them know that marriage was not Moses' idea, nor any human being's. From the 'beginning,' the Manufacturer's manual thus states, "And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet for him" (Gen. 2:18 KJV). This verse marked the beginning of marriage and its intention from the Creator and the Initiator. God has to



speak to bring marriage into existence as He created man. Marriage, then, should have weighty intentions and purposes as the creation of man himself. It calls for God's attention just as man himself becomes God's focus on the earth. Gbile Akanni (2004) says, "Whatever affects marriage registers immediately in God's notepad of urgent issues. He watches over the marital relationship, just as He watches over the man." To him, God must have been grievous and grave to utter that "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Akanni, 2004).

God places such a high premium on marital relationships through the Scriptures that He gives thorough instructions. He was furious about unequal yoking in marriage (Mal. 2:13-16). His passion for marital harmony is solemn. He manufactured marriage, just as he manufactured man. Akanni compliments this when he says, "...the man and his marriage carry an almost equal weight of value before Him" (Akanni, 2004). The marital relationship is a mystery that Ephesians 5:32 likens to the marriage between Christ and His Church. Therefore, physical marriage here on earth must achieve a purpose for which God instituted it. Marital relationships are all-encompassing in all facets of life, including ministry in the Church and on the altar, directly affected by the situation in the minister's home. It is a precondition for Christian service. Here emerged a question, "what is the purpose of instituting marriage?"

The Purpose of Marriage as stated in the Bible

God emphatically says, "It is not good that man should be alone." This connotes seriousness, which means 'it is not good; there is no better way to put it than this. The man was alone in his works, decisions, pursuits, ministry, battles, achievements or failures, plans, and thoughts, alone in everything. Then God saw him and said, 'It is not good.' This *aleness* is not just loneliness that can be overcome in the company of others. It cannot be handled if another man comes close enough. It is that of *sharedness* –a shared life in which another is part thereof, a relationship not of separate and separated entities or individuals. However, joining two of the same whole, in the case of two coming together, makes each of them complete and whole. It enhances life between the couple and completes it in every aspect: "It is not two being with each other, but being one of each other" (Akanni, 2004). Hence, this *aleness* means incompleteness rather than loneliness. No matter how great a man appears to be and how energetic he is, whatever he may accomplish alone, the position of God remains, 'It is not good.' It is not good because he is incomplete (Harley, 2011). Incompleteness is not incompetence. Adam was competent in what he was doing, yet God said, 'It is not good to be alone because he was incomplete. The need for a woman in a man's life is not incompetence but incompleteness. The best man can achieve alone; the best a woman can achieve alone is fractional (Akanni, 2004). Marriage makes it complete and whole. Hence, God brings the woman to the man and into a man's life.

Other purposes include:

To work together both in life and ministry: God is so desirous of man's success that he gave him a wife. Proverbs 18:22 confirms that "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord" (NIV). No wonder in Genesis 2:18, He says, "I will make him a helpmeet for him..." (KJV). The "help" God renders to meet man's challenge of *aleness* is the woman. "Help" is irrelevant when no work exists beyond man's ability. "Help is a sharing of force or burden to make for a mechanical advantage in that which is to be accomplished" (Akanni, 2004). Here, God's purpose is made plain: there is so much for man to accomplish for God on earth; there are so many challenges he must face but which he



cannot face alone; there is a wide field of stress hinging on him as the only pivot, which is shared by another pivot or support, will enhance the balance of forces. God brings woman into a man's life to combine forces and fulfil God's mandate in his life and ministry.

Another purpose is *to Wage one Another in Life and prevent the Ministry from Falling*:

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labour. If they fall, the one will lift the fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Eccl. 4:9-10 KJV).

God's give of a "helpmeet" loves care and provision. He sees not as a man sees. He sees beyond the present situation; hence, He makes provisions both for the present and the future so that man will not fall into pits and snares arranged and arrayed on his way by the enemy. God's divine provision for a man to forestall his downfall in life and ministry is his wife. This is God's foresight and wisdom in bringing the woman into a man's life. God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone in case he stumbles and falls; I will make him a help; a companion; an assistant, meet and suitable, fit and sufficient for him. Let them always move together in life. Let them be each other's keepers. The pit he does not see, depression that may becloud him, sudden confusion he may be exposed to." All these things may not survive them; therefore, 'it is not good for him to be alone.' So God went into the business of making the woman for man. Beyond these, "...if they fall, the one will lift his fellow." Several sad stories about anointed men of God who have fallen, the cause is usually traced to the laps of strange girls, as they walked alone, travelled alone for long periods, and most importantly, thought alone, planned alone, and worked alone without the 'help' God has placed in their lives.

Towards Building Mutual Marital Relationship

There is a need to underscore and understand all the above extractions from the Manufacturer's manual; if well studied and applied, marriage would be heaven on earth as desired. The idea of marriage got contaminated after the Fall due to not following the operative principles as stated in the Bible. Therefore, the primary concern of this section is to highlight those rudiments that would bring about a mutual marital relationship among couples.

First, a *Marital relationship is work*: work is part of God's blessings to man. Work brings fulfilment and purpose to life. God described Israel as a cultivated garden, a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-2ff). Jesus spoke of Himself as the Vine and His followers as the branches. The father tenderly cared for His vineyard (John 15:1ff). Paul described the ministry as the work of a farmer (II Tim. 2:6).

Work was given before the Fall; hence, it is considered a blessing. Genesis 2:15 accounts that God ordered man "To work ...and take care of..." the Garden. Even though the nature of the work was not specified, the writer believes that building a mutual marital relationship is part of it. Since then, any desired harmony, unity, joy, peace, and happiness in a marital relationship will be worked out. It does not come like that, instead of through deliberate effort. God desired man to make Eden his home through active participation in work. (Jacobs, 2007; Chapman, 2004; Adei, 2002). God would have worked everything for man, but He also wished to be part of the processes. According to Ezeka (2007), home (marriage) is to be worked out. In another book, she says, "On the platform of marriage...He (God) gave



them...legal right to live together, work together...and pursue the same purpose” (Ezeka 2007b, pp. 16-17).

Second, *Understanding the Concept of “Oneness”*: “...and the two shall become one flesh.” A critical and careful examination of the principles of marriage, as stated in Genesis 2, reveals the core tenet for building a mutual marital relationship. Most of the manufactured and invented machines come with a manual attached to them to help the operator not damage the machine and cause it to perform below its total capacity. As in Genesis 1 and 2, the reading of Matthew 19:4-6 reveals God’s undiluted wisdom and order for the Christian home. Though the passage may appear brief, the succinct principles therein are eternal; it works all the time and in all situations, regardless of culture, tradition, or racial inclinations.

Those passages above portray the concept of *oneness*, but this concept never means *sameness*. Some of the challenges confronting marriage today emanated from the demands of either party to behave in the likeness of the other, contrary to what God meant by them ‘becoming one.’ The Scripture says, “...he made them at the beginning *male* and *female*” (emphasis added). O’Donovan (2000, p. 192) opines, “These statements show us that, when God created human beings, there were no differences in importance or value between men and women. They are both created by God. They are both created in His image.” He adds, “They are of equal importance and value to God—not because they are male or female, but because they are human beings. If we place greater importance on either men or women, we are challenging the truth of God” (O’Donovan, 2000, p. 192; Keller & Keller, 2011; Adei, 2000). Misunderstanding this fact always cracks the foundation of marital relationships. God did not expect them to become one because everything was the same.

Many marriages collapse because the partners misunderstand these differences in creation. Even though they are of equal importance, their making from the beginning was different – male and female, and not male and male or female and female. Anatomically, a man’s outlook differs from a woman’s and is designed intentionally by the Manufacturer. Therefore, as revealed in Genesis 2, the concept of oneness is not because they are to become a replica of each other. He made them ‘male and female’ in the beginning. This fact clarified to the man (husband) that a woman (wife) is not another man and vice versa. She is not made male, and neither is he. A woman is made to fashion as female, her preference; the concept of things will always and forever remain *female*. Misunderstanding is always generated when a man (husband) wishes his wife to function like him, act like him, walk like him, and vice versa, which is impossible. The fact remains that they were created as *male* and *female*. The woman is always a wife because God made her a female, intrinsically and deliberately. There is no way a man would think and feel like a woman because he is not another *female*. He is *male*, likewise the woman.

Jesus pointed to this as the first revelation every man and woman in marriage must have. This understanding should be monitored in the marital relationship. Couples must be willing to give enough space to enable each other to express themselves as they relate to matrimony. 1 Peter 3:7 uses the word *knowledge*, “...dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life...”(KJV). Williams’ translation puts it this way, “ye married men, in the same way, must live with your wives in an intelligent consideration of them; you must show them the *difference*, too as the weaker sex, as they share with you the gracious gift of life...” (Emphasis mine).



Oneness is not *sameness*. Female is not male. The female is female; likewise, the male is male. Man must not squeeze the *female* out of the woman, compelling her to be a male. She will only be reduced to a malfunctioning female. The woman must not resist the *male* in the man, making him a female. Akanni says, “He will only become a feeble, fearful, fretting and feverish man; in short a fe—male” (Akanni, 2004, p. 172).

There must be this intelligent consideration, a clear understanding, and recognition of these fundamental structural differences that existed from the ‘beginning.’ The woman is different in design from the man. She was described as the ‘weaker vessel,’ not the weak sex. Comparatively, a weaker vessel means delicateness and not inferiority. Compared to her husband, she is the weaker sex when handling issues; she may not be able to withstand stress for long before her emotions cave in. She is beautiful, solid, and efficient only when using the Manufacturer’s design. He made them male and female.

Third, *Understanding the Mind Structure*: The man’s mind structure differs from the woman’s. It also affects their outlook on things and situations. This goes all the way to affect and influence their marital relationship. A man’s mind is structured in compartments. He can handle general issues in his mind concurrently. Each can be given measured attention without interfering much with the other issues. Things are arranged in his mind like books on the shelf. He pulls out one issue neatly for dissension while his mind still engages with the other issues but in their compartments. This is why a man can switch on and off from one issue to another (Konzen & Konzen, 2018). For example, he can discuss his business trips while a family problem is pending. In the middle of an inconclusive matter, he may pull out a desire for sex from the shelf of his mind (Adjabeng, 1995).

This is not true for the woman whose mind structure is a pile in only one file case. Issues are piled one on top of the other. Every new issue comes on top of the ones in mind before. She needs first to off-load the topmost issue to pull a matter up without confusion. Issues are not arranged in order of importance. Priority is given to the latest issue that comes to her mind (Akanni, 2004). A disturbance from one issue may cause a collapse of all the piles. She gets confused and depressed as everything falls apart. A woman may be pretty active and expressing a few minutes ago until she hears bad news about someone special to her. That would probably finish her day and scatter the issues on her mind. She becomes immediately restless and uncoordinated.

Nevertheless, the husband hearing the same news may only be bothered for a few minutes. He pulls that aspect out and may shake his head while his mind races to consider another matter. The two have different approaches to issues, not because of anything but how their mind is structured to function. These differences must be understood both by men and women.

Biblical Watchword for Building Mutual Marital Relationship

Closely reading Ephesians 5:22-33 reveals two important marital watchwords: *submission* and *love*. Psychologically, the differences in traits and approaches to issues between men and women can be exploited if these two watchwords, stated in the operational Manufacturer’s mutual, are strictly used. A careful look into these verses (Eph. 5:22-33) draws application to the husband and wife:



First, “Wives, submit to your husbands....” To be submissive means to subordinate oneself as being secondary; depending on it, it is to adapt and fit into the plans and vision of one being submissive. Submission is not natural to human nature. It is disrespectful to the person seeking his way and exercising his intellectualism. For a woman, the greatest challenge to her nature is learning to submit and to serve under the man without a sense of agitation or being cheated or undermined. According to Akanni, “The temptation the first woman yielded to was that of usurping the husband’s authority. She went too forward to decide and agree with a stranger when she could have referred the tempter to her head. Her safety was hiding behind the man and not bringing out her chest for notice” (Akanni, 2004, p. 328). It is not a matter of the woman’s inferiority but a matter of divine ordering. The man comes first, then the woman. If the wife learns submission, not as an occasional act after much argument, but as a way of life, she will grow to all her height in the Lord. God ordered the woman to be submissive from the manual and appointed a man (husband) to receive her submission. When she does that, it is the same as to the Lord. Ministry gifts are available to the women in the Church. The Church does not restrict her from exercising her ministry gift if it does not constitute a lack of submission to her husband, who is her head. Ministry in the Church must not interfere with the matter between a woman and her husband. She helps the man to come to the place of leadership, where she also has ample room for expression (Anderson, 2003; Authur, 2000).

Whereas the need to submit to spiritual authority is a mandate for every believer if he/she would bear any ministry for the Lord, it is peculiar here for the married woman. Her husband becomes the recipient of the submission she would give to God as a basis for spiritual promotion in life and ministry (Akanni, 2004). “Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ, let the wives be to their husbands in everything.” The wife needs to know that her submission to her husband is already a service to the Lord. It is a ministry to the Lord. It is a help for the man to fulfil the purpose and programme of the Lord in his hands.

Second, “..... Husbands, love your wives....” Since the Fall, the most significant problem of women is to learn submission again, while a man’s most significant problem is selfishness. He seeks to exercise authority for self-interest. He wants to lord it over the woman without any compassion. He mainly enslaves and exploits her, usually to serve his ego.

In the man’s heart for the wife, this matter of love is what God looks for in every marital relationship He has instituted. The intent looks at the various issues, and the analogy in Eph.5:23-33 uses the passage to describe the husband’s place; one striking thing that jumps out is the direct comparison of the husband’s role with Christ towards the Church. Every married man is mandated to represent the Lord Jesus to his wife as accurately as possible, in love, selfless sacrifice, sanctification, washing, and cleaning the wife until she is presentable without any spot or wrinkle. The husband’s headship over his wife is likened to Christ as the head of the Church and her Saviour. To be the ‘head’ is a serious matter. The full coordination of the human body is located in the head. All the particular sensory organs are located in the head. It is from the head that the entire plan regarding the body is hatched. Understanding that the husband is the head of the wife, just like Christ is the Head of the Church, is a grave responsibility. He is not just a leader who only directs; he must reason and see ahead for his wife (Akanni, 2004; Adjabeng, 2001).

As Christ is the Saviour of the body, the husband must also be of his wife. In this case, he is like the defender, the protector, the scapegoat, and the ransom. He keeps the vigil against any



assault of the enemy while the wife is sleeping. He fights battles to keep his home safe and secure. He must be the shepherd of his own family. He feeds for them and seeks a resting place ahead of time (Adei, 1999; Adjabeng, 1999).

The figurative use of the head here is not about status but the service that the head continually renders to the body to keep it functioning. For a husband to render this service to his wife without being a bully or tyrant, there must be a watchword: love. The motivation for this kind of service is love, the Agape. It is love from the heart. It is selfless, sacrificial love, and this kind of love expected by the husband to demonstrate for his wife is the same as that of Christ, which he demonstrated for the Church. Christ demonstrated his love by dying for sinners; they were righteous, reasonable, and prayerful but ungodly. This is the kind of love God expects the husband to show and demonstrate in practice to his wife on His behalf. Ezeka (2018c: 13) says that love is not natural for the husband; it is supernatural...God told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, His body.” See what love is and does:

Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It is not rude; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs, and love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects truths, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails (I Cor.13:4-8a).

CONCLUSION

Indeed, every manufactured and invented thing works effectively if the Manufacturer’s manual is studied meticulously, and there would be no incidences of malfunctioning. Marriage is instituted and invented by God; attached is the manual on how it can be operated for the beneficiary’s benefit. This manual is the Bible, available in almost every Christian home. Going back to it and studying what God, the marriage Manufacturer, has stated would be a wise choice.

According to the book of Genesis, God first created a man (Adam) to exercise dominion over his creation and then a woman (Hawah) to be the man’s “suitable helper” (Genesis 2:18, 20). “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold tight to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This verse lays out the biblical pattern as God established it from the beginning: one man marries one woman, and the two form a new natural family. In this context, “become one flesh” alludes to forming a new family and the sexual union between the husband and wife that leads to children’s birth. This is in line with God’s initial order to the first human couple to “be prolific and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion” over all creation (Genesis 1:28). These features of marriage—male-female complementarity and the essential function of male-female relationships in human reproduction—are part of the original order of creation and are visible to all human beings from nature’s enduring order.

According to the New Testament, restoring God’s original intention for marriage in Christ is part of God’s realignment of all things under Christ’s power and reign. The Bible declares that God’s objective is to “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” in Ephesians (Ephesians 1:10, NIV). Thus, marriage is an element of God’s end-time restoration of all things in the person of Jesus Christ, not an end in itself. The biblical



marital pattern is best demonstrated by examining Ephesians 5:21–33, the New Testament’s preeminent passage on marital roles. The passage covers first women, then husbands (Ephesians 5:22–33), first children, then parents (Ephesians 6:1–4), and first enslaved people, then masters (Ephesians 6:5–9; comparable “house tables” can also be found in Colossians 3:18–4:1 and 1 Peter 2:11–3:7).

On the other hand, wives are expected to submit to their husbands as if they were the Lord. Wives should submit to their husbands in everything, just as the Church does to Christ (Ephesians 5:21–24). Husbands are to love their spouses like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. They must physically and spiritually provide for their spouses and cherish them as God’s particular provision (Ephesians 5:25–30).

God’s original creation pattern for marriage will be completed once more as Christian husbands and wives carry out these marital roles: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31, citing Genesis 2:24). Against these injunctions, there is the pervasive nature of divorce and the extensive attack on marriage as an institution in today’s culture. Therefore, this article calls on people of Hona and various cultures to participate in marriage with the proper knowledge to build a home that this generation will reference, including those who do not believe in God, Christ, or the Bible. However, Christians believe that a rigorous investigation of scriptural teachings can provide a complete understanding of God’s will for marriage. The Church is responsible for teaching herself and the broader culture about the scope and depth of God’s plans for marriage.

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