

## **PAUL'S CONCEPT OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY IN MARRIAGE: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF I CORINTHIANS 7:1-5 IN THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

**Ige, Abiodun Simeon, (Ph.D)**

Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
Kogi State University, P.M.B 1008, Anyigba Kogi State

**NIGERIA**

&

**Owoyemi, J.O, (Ph.D)**

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Science, Kogi State University, Anyingba

**NIGERIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

Sexual activities have breed discord and broken many homes on the African continent. In many cases children born to these homes are left without hope and the family in disarray. Some who took Oaths to celibate life remain unfaithful today. This article traces the position of Paul on sexual activities in marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 and the African view on sex and its' importance in marriage. Paul's theology on sexuality encourages sex in marriage and celibacy against the immoral practices of the Aphrodite cult of his day. In Africa, sexuality is important in marriage and seems not to promote celibacy. The paper adopts the exegetical, theological, and comparative approaches in carrying out this investigation.

**Keywords:** Africa, Celibacy, Marriage, Paul, Sexuality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of sexuality in marriage is very germane to all living creatures, especially the animal folk. The Bible is overwhelmingly in its treatment of marriage and sexuality. In the creation account, especially that of man and woman, much emphasis is placed on the goodness of love and sex within the context of marriage<sup>1</sup>. Among humans, it is becoming a global issue. This is because, in contrast to the normal marriage system between a man and a woman, today we hear of lesbianism, homosexuality, gay or same sex marriage and the likes. This is against the Biblical injunction in Romans 1:21-29. The problem of sexuality characterized our society today. Daily, we hear of rape cases, sexual harassment, most especially by male lecturers on campuses of higher institutions of learning; even stories of religious leaders including Reverend Fathers, General overseers and other ministers of God having affairs with females, especially students or extra-marital affairs with their secretaries; and broken homes over sexual matters are on the alarming rate.

The future of the family is threatened by marriage infidelity. The question is; what does the scripture says about sexuality? Is celibacy a must? What does the scripture and Apostle Paul says about abstinence? This article seeks to provide a socio-theological solution via the exegesis of I Corinthians 7:1-5 against the African context. The aim of this article is to examine the problem of sexual activity that has destroyed marriages and families, lecturers, Priests and ministers of God and their ministries among others in Nigeria today. Effort is made from the African context, to explore the Yoruba view of sexuality in marriage and the possible place of celibacy for African (Yoruba) Priests. As we begin, it is important to have background knowledge of the man called Paul.

## The Man Paul

The greatest human missionary of all times was the apostle Paul. This *ex-pharisee* who had once hated and hounded Christians, made three great missionary trips during which he established dozen of local New Testament Churches. Thus, the former vicious “wolf of the flock” became one of God’s finest “Sheep dogs.”<sup>2</sup> He was Saul; his personal testimony shows; “circumcised on the eight day, a *Benjamite* by tribe, a Hebrew of the Hebrews a flawless and zealous legalistic Pharisee (Phil. 3:5-6). “Are they Hebrews, so am I, Are they Abraham’s descendants so am I; Are they servants of Christ, I am more” (II Cor. 11:22-23). His assertions are important. His epistle within the New Testament cannot be exaggerated. From a chronological point of view, his letters are acknowledged to have been written before the gospels. For this reason, the interpretation of the gospel must in some way be built on them, bearing in mind that the teaching and work of Jesus is the basis of his theology<sup>3</sup>. A passage in a second century document, the “acts of Paul and *Thecla*” is fascinating in that it is the origin of the only tradition we possess concerning the physical appearance of the apostle Paul. It reads “... and he saw Paul coming, a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometime he appears like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.”<sup>4</sup> The above assertion may or may not be true but the New Testament is stamped with evidences of his personality and work.

To be factual, considering the works of Paul in the New Testament, apart from Jesus Christ, Paul was the greatest figure in the history of Christianity. We may confidently say that the Christianity of today is broadly speaking, the Christianity of Paul. This conclusion is undoubtedly correct for it was the ministry of Paul, under God that made Christianity of universal importance. Saul, later Paul was a young man (Act 7:58), a native of Tarsus; one of the three University cities of that age (Others were Alexandria and Athens). He was a Jew by birth and proud of his Jewish ancestry. He was possibly educated in Tarsus in early years; though Acts 22:3 suggests that he might have been sent to Jerusalem for education while quite young. He had a Hellenistic background which did not overshadow his Jewish outfit and heritage. He was born to Roman citizenship which gave him certain privilege and influence. He lived by blending his person of Hebrew, Greek and Romans life; so he was capable of the great task placed on him by Christ as declared to him by Ananias in Act 8:15. Saul’s Roman Cognomen is Paul, it was first mentioned in Act 13:9. This name was more appropriate and fit well into his environment- the Roman world. Paul wrote about thirteen out of the twenty seven books of the New Testament. He outran and outworked all the disciples though called out of time and through revelation, unlike the other apostles who were direct followers of Jesus Christ. Having examined the life of Paul, it is equally important to look at what sexual activity is as a necessary ingredient to the understanding of this paper.

## Meaning and Importance of Marriage

The onset of the family is marriage. Marriage is an institution found in all human societies, whether pre-literature or modern. It is socially recognized, legitimized and supported union of individuals of opposite sexes<sup>5</sup>. According to Tischer, marriage differs from other unions such as friendships in that (1) it takes place in a public (and usually formal) manner, (2) It includes sexual intercourse as an explicit element of the relationship; (3) It provides the essential condition for legitimizing offspring; and (4) It is intended to be a stable and enduring relationship<sup>6</sup>. In his own submission Adelola defines marriage as a type of arrangement through which a union is formed between a man and a woman for the purpose of bearing and

rearing children and establishing a family. Loaded into this definition are that the union involves sexual relationship for offsprings and identity with the social organism<sup>7</sup>. From the above, the importance of marriage cannot be over emphasized. Ogunkunle notes that marriage is a significant institution because it arises out of the divine programme for humanity. It was planned by God from creation the human need for companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help and sexual satisfaction<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, for a man or woman who has reached the age of marriage to remain single is against the norms of the Yoruba especially<sup>9</sup>.

### **Sexuality and Sexual Activity**

Man by nature is a sexual being. This is because man has sexual desire. The term human sexuality refers to matters of gender, sexual behavior, sexual feelings and the biology of sex. Human sexuality comprises all the ways in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings. From the African perspective, sexuality is a muffed concept to define. However, the world Health organization (WHO) in 2001 gave a definition of sexuality from a group of experts as a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions not all of them are always experienced or expressed<sup>10</sup>. As a composite term referring to the totality of being a person, sexuality suggests our human character, not simply our genital acts and has implications regarding the total meaning of being a man or woman. It is concerned with the biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual variables of life that affect personality development and interpersonal relations<sup>11</sup>. Sex is defined as the characteristics of being male or female, and all things connected, which distinguish a male from a female.<sup>12</sup>

Sexual activity on the other hand is the sum total of activities that involve the fusion of the male and female sex organs. It is also the touching of the male or the female sex organs by the opposite sex; or the attraction between two people and the activities that lead to or include sex. For the purpose of this paper one needs to be more clear and down to the tone, thus sexual activity will plainly be explained as beginning with verbal exchange of words and agreement which may further into other activities like kissing, caressing or romance<sup>13</sup>, ending up in sexual intercourse, which has been explained above as the fusion of the male and female sex organs. The metaphysics of sexuality is only found explicit ones in the Bible; “seal me in your heart with permanent betrothal, for love is strong as death, and jealousy is cruel as *sheol*. It flashes fire, the very flame of Jehovah. Many waters cannot quench the flame of love neither can the floods drown it. If a man tried to buy it with everything he owned he couldn’t buy it” (Songs of Solomon 8:6-7). Apart from the quotation above there is no explicit reflection on the meaning of sexuality or its place in the cosmic order.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Social Background of the Text**

It is necessary to look at the socio-economic life of Corinth as a background to the text. Corinth was the principal city of Greece which thrived for hundreds of years before Christ. However, in about 150 years before Christ, it was totally destroyed by the Romans when the Greeks rebelled against Roman rule. It sat in ruins, desolate and uninhabited for a hundred years until Julius Ceaser ordered it to be rebuilt and resettled as a Roman colony around 44 BC. Romans, Greeks and large number of freed slaves eventually settled in the city. Life in the city was influenced by life and habits of all the nations of the Mediterranean. From 27 BC

onward, it was the seat of administration of the Roman province of Achaia.<sup>15</sup> Its location on an isthmus made it a cross road for travelers and traders. This was a four and a half mile wide strip of land with sea on both sides that connected the southern part of Greece to the northern part. Land travelers from different parts of Greece had to pass through it, and, with the harbours on both sides, it attracted commerce from the sea. Goods flowed through the city from Italy and Spain and from Asia Minor, Phoenicia and Egypt. Today, they actually have a canal for this. Although, known for shipping and trade, there were some industries in Corinth. It was known for bronze making. Aside, the economy was also sustained by tourism. Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games similar to the Olympics of today. Travelers to these games needed food, drinks as well as accommodation. In the absence of the modern hotels, people stayed in tents. This suggests why Paul was able to work successfully as a tentmaker when he lived in Corinth as recorded in Acts 18. Corinth then became transformed from being very poor to very rich after its reestablishment but there was great disparity between the rich and the poor.

Corinth was a highly religious city with several temples dedicated to different gods. It had more than three temples to the Greek goddess Aphrodite; the goddess of love whose worshippers practiced religious prostitution. This had highly influenced their understanding of sexuality. The city's devotion to Aphrodite coupled with the large traffic of sailors, travellers and business people through the city led Corinth to become so known for promiscuity. At one time 1000 sacred prostitutes served her temple. The immorality was so widely known that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" means "to practice sexual immorality" or "go to the devil."<sup>16</sup> At the centre of the city in the "Agora" market place stood the bronze statue of Athena and next to it is the temple of Apollo which today is the most prominent ruin from antiquity. Other gods noticed in the city includes Hermes, Zeus, Artemis, Dionysus among others. Paul first arrives Corinth in the autumn of AD 50, in the course of his second missionary journey after his somewhat unsuccessful mission in Athens. His mission was successful for he founded the Corinthian church around AD51. His stay of not less than 18 months is recorded in Acts 18:11. Here, he met and stayed with Aquila and Priscilla who had left Rome as a result of the expulsion of Jews by Emperor Claudius. There was a Synagogue of the Jews located at the market place where they gathered regularly at Sabbath to read the law and remind themselves of the beliefs and practices of their fathers. Other members of the synagogue are 'proselytes' (non Jews who practices Jewish religion and initiated into Jewish community).

### **General Pauline Theology about Sexual Activity**

Little is known about Paul's sexual experience. However, if Rom 7:7-25 is read as Pauline autobiography that will then mean that his sexual desire awoke at the onset of puberty. All we know and are sure of is that Paul was single (1 Cor 7:7-8), whether as a widower (I Cor. 9:5) or as one who never married or whose wife left him to remain single without suffering from inordinate sexual desire (I Cor. 7:9). It seems that the greater reference to sexual issue by Paul more than the gospels shows somehow the laxer sexual moves of Hellenistic Societies.<sup>17</sup> He shows the incompatibility between a life of sexual license and the Kingdom of God - for no immoral, impure person has inheritance in God's Kingdom (Eph. 5:5). Based on I Cor. 7:5, apostle Paul argues against a forced and false ascetism, though, not that he hates sexual activities. In an era where women were given separate rooms so as to deprive them of the love or face of their husband who mixes with other women outside, the Greek verb "*Exousiaso*" literally means "has right over." Both couples should stay sexually together, except for prayer – why? – that they might individually identify their union with Christ and exercise their right and privileges in communion with God.<sup>18</sup> Paul never addresses the subject

of human sexuality in a systematic manner but says much about it in response to particular question. Less fragrant sexual problem at Corinth evoked Paul's most intended discussion of sexuality. What actually happened was that the Corinthians distorted eschatology, which had them exalting prematurely in the completeness of salvation here and now (I Cor. 4:8). This led some to be libertine, going about with the slogan: "Everything is permissible for me" (I Cor. 6:12); and others to be ascetic under the banner "it is good for a man not to have sexual relation with a woman" (I Cor. 7:1). In order to meet such challenges and change the presented views above, Paul laid the groundwork for a suggestive flexible Christian sexuality. To Paul, sexuality involves the whole being using the whole body as the illustration; if we are God's Temple, then something is wrong with using the same body for prostitution. Undergirding such teaching lays Paul's distinctive anthropology in which the flesh or body is not merely external expression or instrument of the true person that resides in some inner essence. For him, he rather says that human being is a body rather than has a body. This is a way of speaking about the man as a sexual being at the same time as a being in Christ<sup>19</sup>. To be a sexual being, man is said to have sexual desire.

Further, in his discourse, Paul gives a place for abstinence. Having established some facts in I Cor. 7:2-4, the next question is not whether sex is good but when is abstinence right? This is the trigger of this paper. If sex is good, why is abstinence necessary? I Cor. 7:5. This passage as discussed briefly above arose from a suggestion which came from Corinth that, if married people are to be Christians, they must abstain from all intercourse with each other. In a time of special discipline or a time of earnest and long prayer, it might be right or necessary to set aside all bodily things or bodily pleasures, since there is no royal road to success. He went further to say that this is not an ideal command but a considerate concession to human weakness. Paul wishes that all men were like him-single (widower-or whatever). That we are sure of is that Paul was a rabbi, who excelled in modesty and exemplary life, which Jewish rabbinic law and tradition laid down. Every orthodox Jew cannot, but marry, if not, such a one is referred to as haven stained his posterity or lessens the image of God on earth. Paul, we know, was a Sanhedrin (Act 26:10) and one of the criteria for membership was marriage, it was believed that been married has a sense of judgment when it comes to interpreting the law, and that they are more merciful compared to young rabbis.

This idea that he wished all men be like him is probably that he wished the second coming will be at once and time is too short to allow any physical or earthly thing, no matter how pleasurable, to distract ones attention – even sexual activities.<sup>20</sup> Paul's own preference is that men should be celibate rather than hiding under false asceticism. In that state, they serve the Lord without any distractions of being involved in marriage. In the rush of life, it may be necessary sometimes to take exceptional measure to secure a quite leisurely intercourse with God; for married people the breaking off of normal relationship even for such a holy purpose can only be by mutual consent.<sup>21</sup> That sexual intercourse brought about cult impurity was an idea current not only among the Jews (Ex. 19:15; Levi. 15:18), but also among the Greeks. But notice should be taken that even some of the Greek gods have temple prostitution as some of their worship rites. In the Old Testament Jewish circle, sexual intercourse does not so much hamper holiness since procreation was mandatory and men could have sex outside their home with prostitutes or concubines.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, ceremonial washing and sometimes abstinences from the community solve the problem. The apostle Paul argues for abstinence for a short period of time and it have to be by mutual agreement. The harm of enforced abstinence in respect of cohabitation is well known. "Psychiatrists consulting rooms are thronged with people who suffer in various ways as the outcome of sex frustration; the

passionate drive of the sex instinct is liable to become enhanced when legitimate gratification is withheld.”<sup>23</sup>

### The Exegesis of I Cor. 7:1-5

The pericope of this text is verses one to seven. In this paragraph, the matter of marriage is clearly treated separately from other matters that the Corinthians wrote to inquire about. The reason Paul treated the matter separately may be because of the challenges the Church faced about marriage which necessitated their request for guidance (1 cor. 7:1a). Apostle Paul wrote in the introduction: “it is good for a man not to marry”; it is footnoted in the New International Version study Bible as “it is good for a man not to have sexual relation with a woman”. The statement is probably quoted from the letters of the Corinthians. The word marry is *aptestai* (aptestai). The indicative root of it is *apto* which means to kindle; but in the middle tense, it is used as “to touch” (I Cor. 7:1), a touch of attention. The synonym is *aptomai* which also mean to touch or handle<sup>24</sup>. An ascetic party in the Church may have taken this stand by way of reaction from the laxity of the environment. It is as if Paul is saying ...”as far as I am concerned it is good not to marry but ... the amplified version have it as “it is well (and by that I mean advantageous, expedient, profitable and wholesome) for a man not to touch a woman (to cohabit with her) but to remain unmarried.

The reason for the above statement is the Pauline view of immorality or fornication-*porneias*-unrestrained, indiscriminate sexual indulgences. This statement shows that the apostle Paul does not put marriage in a low esteem, but his statement was dictated by the moral condition of the Corinthians. The same word is used in Act 15:20, 29, as a thing or act or habit that must be abstained from. It is used as a symbol for idol worshiping in Rev. 14:8 and 19:2, 4; where Babylon is described as a whore who made all nations drink of her adultery. Therefore, to escape fornication each man and woman is not only to marry but to fulfill their marital duties to each other. 1 Corinthians 7:3 says: “to the wife, let the husband “render” due benevolence and likewise the wife to the husband.” The word render is “*apodidoto*” a present imperative, indicating a normal condition, the mutual paying of debt. *Apodidomi* means to give from one self or to deliver. In Matt. 28:58, it is used as pay-off, discharge what is due.<sup>25</sup> It is used in some other places as in Matt. 5:26, Luke 16:2 to render; Luke 4:20 to requite, recompense; Rom. 11:6 and Rev. 18:6. This mutual fulfillment of conjugal duty seem to raise the position of the woman to an equal pedestal with the man, she is not a chattel. Benevolence is *opheilomenen* in Greek from *opheile* meaning a thing or debt to be jointly paid. The same phrase is used or translated as good will” in Eph. 6:7.

Their bodies do not belong to them individually but collectively. 1Corinthians 7:4 suggests that they do not have authority or right to use their body the way they please or will. The outside use is prohibited and finalized. Within the home, both couple has a demanding right. No partner may rightly quote Matt. 20:15 “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?...” as a defense. To exercise authority on ones body is to defraud or deprive the other partner. To defraud is *aposteriete* a present active imperative verb from *apostereo* which means to steal, rob, and defraud Cf 1 Cor. 6:8.<sup>26</sup> A chance is given not for defrauding or depriving but for abstinence for a period, for a particular purpose. The word: *Eimeti* means except, unless in a given case or unless perhaps, by mutual consent. The word *Sumphonou* implies by agreement. The phrase *Pros Kairon* indicates for a time or for a period. *Kairon* is a fixed time, season, and opportunity (Luke 8:13, Heb. 11:15 Acts 14:17, Rom. 8:18), while *xeonos* is time in general. *Kairos* is definite, suitable time, time of some decisive event.<sup>27</sup> The purpose for such abstinence is prayer. That you may be at “leisure” for the purpose of fasting

and prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5c). *Skolasete* is an aorist subjunctive of *skolaso*, meaning to be at leisure, to be empty or unoccupied as in Matt. 12:44. To have leisure for (*datwe*), give oneself to (I Cor. 7:5). The word school is coined out of this word. A place of study is supposed to be free from disturbance at all cost.<sup>28</sup> “*Nestela*” means fasting; a fast (Matt. 17:21; Acts 14:23) here is used as for the day of atonement and for the fast of the Jewish high priest fast days (Acts. 27:9; II Cor. 6:5, 11:27). “*proseuke*” – suggests prayer, particularly to God or a place where prayer is offered (Act 16:13-16.). Prayer in Greek means or involves many things as it could be viewed from many angles. For example *Euke* is used when it means simply prayer. If it has general apparent significance, *proseuke* is used. *Deesis* is sometimes used interchangeably with *proseuke*. *Proseuke* is used restricted to prayer to God, while *deesis* has no such restriction. *Deesis* also refers chiefly to prayer for particular benefit, while *proseuke* is more general. *Entevsis* when used for prayer has to do with boldness and freedom in approach to God. *Eukapistia*, is prayer of thanksgiving, the grateful acknowledgement of God’s mercy, chiefly in prayer. *Altema*, much like *deesis* denotes a specific petition for a particular thing. In *Iketeria*, the attitude of humility and deprecation in prayer is specially emphasized. 1Corinthians 7:5 is “again for the same purpose”.

According to Lenski, it means to be sexually together again. It should be noted that Jewish Rabbis taught that abstinence from intercourse was allowed for generally one to two weeks, but students of the Law may continue abstinence for 30 days against the will of their wives, while they occupy themselves in the study of the Law. The result of such long abstinence is sexual temptation because of lack of self control.<sup>29</sup> To come together again thus suggest something for more frequent, regular and intimate, so as to disallow the devil from tempting the couple. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, *Peirase* is the present subjunctive of *Peiraso* which means to tempt or try with the aim of bringing something or someone to fall. Act 16:7 used the infinitive as to attempt or to make trial or to test (Jn. 6:6). In Jas 1:13-14 it is used as “to tempt to sin,” therefore *O’Peiraso* means the tempter, that is the devil (Matt. 4:3). The synonym is *dokimaso* meaning to test anything with expectation of finding it good. For example to try, scrutinize, prove (II Cor. 8:22, Luke 12:56), to judge fit, approve (I Cor. 16:3). Invariably, what the devil is looking for is that whether one can stand the test or not. *Peiraso*, then is to test with the aim of finding fault. In a good sense it is used of God who tests to prove his people true (Job 6:6, Heb. 11:7). In a bad sense, it is used to bring something against an individual Matt. 16:1, 19:3; Mark 8:11, 10:2, 12:15; Luke 11:16, 20:23. Temptations come via the weak points; lack of self control.

*Akrasian* used in a bad sense as enticement to sin (Gal. 6:1 James 1:13a). From the above explanation it could be noted that Paul understood the natural sexual instinct in man so well that he would not advise anyone to remain unmarried, hence he concluded his argument in verses six and seven. Marriage is permitted by concession though he wishes all men are like him- an itinerant evangelist, missionary, who could not probably carry a woman along in such a rough and rigorous work; moreover as someone who has the gift (charisma) or continence. To him, both marriage and celibacy are gifts from God. One can have this or that, that is, either of the two. Factually, there might be some married couples in Corinth who abstained from intercourse on the ground of mistaken asceticism. To those involved, he wrote that only limited pre-planned and agreed period of abstinence is permissible. Clearly then, procreation is not the sole purpose of intercourse. Actually, seasons of deep humiliation require abstinence from Lawful pleasures. Couples are only exposing themselves to danger by either defrauding one another or abstaining for too long attempting to perform what is above their strength, and at the same time not bound on them by any law or by God.

## Sexual activity in the African Perspective

This pericope succinctly examine the African view on sexuality in marriage and celibacy using the Yoruba oral tradition. The Yoruba occupies the south Western states of Nigeria, that is, Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ogun and Ekiti states; and parts of Kogi, Kwara and Edo states<sup>30</sup>. The Yoruba society frowns at pre-marital sex. Sexual satisfaction was strictly reserved for married people. Virginity was highly revered. A girl was expected to keep her virginity (- *Virgo intact*-) until she was married as sexual promiscuity was an abomination. Even a betrothed wife was not to have sex with her fiancé or anyone before her bridal night. It was usually a thing of joy and pride for the bride and her family members if she was found to be a virgin on her wedding night. While it is shameful and disgraceful if found not to be a virgin (*non-Virgo intact*). However, today, sex before marriage seems to now become a norm in most African societies. This may be as a result of the influence of foreign cultures and modernity.

Traditional Africans however have reasons for sexual activity. Let us quickly examine some African reasons for sex from the Yoruba perspective. In Africa, sex is geared towards procreation. Among the Yoruba race, there is a myth<sup>31</sup> of a man who lived many years ago called, *Ágbontósà*. According to this tradition, *Ágbontósà* lived a very careful life in order to please *Olòdùmarè* (Yoruba name for God) so that at death *Olòdùmarè* will place him in the “good heaven” (*Ọrun rere*) a place the people believes to be blissful as opposed to the “heavens of pot-shed” (*Ọrun Àpàádì*) that is believed to be a place of torment. By being careful, he never wanted to commit any sin; so he decided never to have sex, for he saw sex as evil and therefore lived a life of celibacy, and also cautioned himself from other vices that may discredit his person before God and the society. For this, he was well respected and revered by the people.

Eventually, *Ágbontósà* died and was buried. Within the community, there were mixed feelings, speculations and arguments among the people as to where *Olòdùmarè* actually placed *Ágbontósà* in heaven. People thought at death he would go straight to the good heaven of enjoyment. By the Yoruba custom, the traditional priest could make consultation with the dead to get information for the living, to know the cause of his death or his final destination, among others. The Priest while trying to consult on *Ágbontósà*'s eternal abode was only told to direct his call to the “good heaven” believing that *Ágbontósà* could not be elsewhere. This call is usually made thrice consecutively. The call was made thrice to the good heavens but there was no response from him. Then a trial call was made to the heavens of pot-shed. At the first call, *Ágbontósà* answered. He was asked of what led to his being thrown into the heavens of torment and suffering. In response, he said he was judged to have disobeyed *Olòdùmarè* by refusing to marry, because *Olòdùmarè*'s purpose for him was for nations to have come from him. His refusal to marry therefore amounted to truncating *Olòdùmarè*'s plan and purpose for his life while on earth.

The above suggest why the Yoruba value marriage and child bearing against living a celibate life. Celibacy appears to be foreign to Africa and the Yoruba in particular. To the traditional African, celibacy is a taboo. The principle to abstain from sex for a while for the purpose of prayer is practicable among the Yoruba, but, not to abstain for too long (as in celibacy) as it is not part of its tradition. This appears to be the situation all over Africa. Sex also has religious connotations among the Yoruba. Mbiti suggests that the concept of personal immortality should help us to understand this religious significance. Unless a person has children and close relations to remember him when he has died physically, he is nobody and simply



forgotten. Hence, it became a religious and ontological duty to have sex in marriage so as to have children who will keep him in personal immortality (with other living-dead of the family). Eschatology in African Traditional Religion like other religious tradition is not a matter for argument or speculation. If a man has no children or only daughters, he marries another wife so that sons may be born who would survive him so as not to be cut off from personal immortality<sup>32</sup>. Even persons born as eunuchs in Africa (especially among the Yoruba) still get married. Agreement is reached within the family for someone usually a close relation through whom she will bear children. But, these children shall be for the eunuch, they shall answer his name and he alone is known to them as their father. The same goes for a woman eunuch. She can marry a woman to bear children for her through a man of her choice. All is done that they may have children to keep them in personal immortality when they are no more. This practice is still on till today.

Among the Yoruba, unlike the Greek Aphrodite cult; temple or shrine prostitution is forbidden. Irrespective of the Divinity (god) a priest is attached, a demand is laid upon the priest when entering his sacred office to be sexually clean. That is why the priest should be a person of advanced age and the priestess must have past childbearing and sexual habits. Even a married priest must be properly washed with water (often with a decoction of herbs) and traditional antiseptic soap before going into the presence of the divinity. Menstruating women are banned from the shrine<sup>33</sup>. In some cases women are totally banned from participating or seeing the adherents during the festival celebration as is the case of *òrò* worship in Kabba kogi state Nigeria. This confirms the Yoruba saying: *B'òbìnrìń fójú k'òrò, òrò agbē* (if a woman sees *òrò*, *òrò* will arrest her). Purity in worship and sacrifice is held in high esteem in Yoruba religion.

## EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Men and women like *Ágbontósà* who think sex is basically evil often try to deny their own sexual feelings and push them out of their consciousness. The flaw in this plan is that sexual feelings are such a basic part of human make up that one cannot deny for long. The sex drives lie smoldering in the subconscious waiting for an unguarded moment to pop out. They often reappear in disguised form such as anxiety, nervousness and sometimes physical illness. The order for short term abstinence has been given as a tribute to the holiness of God and to separate his people from the indiscriminate idolaters around whom they live. The same thing is applicable to the Pauline undertone for the Corinthians; that is; he is saying of effect that the Church of Christ is not the same thing as the shrine of Aphrodite; the goddess of love, who could be worshipped with prostitution. Like the Church of Christ, Yoruba traditional worship is also devoid of prostitution. The apostle neither argues for celibacy nor marriage but making a balance between the two.

There are some cases when abstinence is good, and in most cases the husband and wife should be together in mutual love. To aspire for spiritual power is not a sin, but, it must be done on a neutral ground without negating the divine mandate for marriage. Africa and the Yoruba in particular value marriage and child bearing, therefore it appears, based on human nature and tradition, Africans and the Yoruba in particular may not be able to continue to live the life of celibacy or encourage celibacy. Therefore, those living the celibate life in Africa and especially among the Yoruba have both natural human sexual feelings and tradition to contend with as they profess their religious faith. The question is; should African Priests be allowed to marry so as to prevent some level of sexual immorality? Based on the judgement

meted out to *Ágbontósà* by God, and Pauls' none insistent on compulsory celibacy from our study, this paper therefore advocate against celibacy for African Priests.

## NOTE AND REFERENCES

1. Ogunkunle C. O. "An exegetical study of Genesis 2:18 – 25 and its Application to the Yoruba Marriage and Custom." *Insight : Journal of Religious Studies*, Babcock University Religious Studies Department. 2007. Ogun State, Nigeria: 1.
2. Willmington, H.L, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981: 413.
3. Marsh, P W. In *The International Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1986: 71.
4. Marsh, P W. Ibid: 1094.
5. Tischler, H.L. *Introduction to Sociology 8<sup>th</sup> Edition*. United States: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2004: 296.
6. Ibid
7. Adelola, I. O. *A Introduction to Sociology*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Limited, 1986: 44.
8. Ogunkunle C.O. Ibid.
9. Fadipe, N.A. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970.
10. [http www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual\\_health.html](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual_health.html)
11. Njiru, R. N & Kinya C.K "Courage of Sexuality issues in the print media in Kenya" in *Sexuality in the media: Emerging issues in Africa*. Lagos: Africa Regional Sexuality Resources Centre. 2006:35.
12. Noah, Webster. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*. Mexico: William Collins Publishers, 1971: 1663.
13. Hornby, A.S, *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*. Edited by Jonathan Crowther. Oxford: Oxford University press, 1995: 1078.
14. Freeman, D.N. et al "Sin and Sexuality" in *The Anchors Bible Dictionary*. New York: Bantman Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc., 1992, 5:1146.
15. Marsh, P.W. "1 Corinthians." In *The International Bible Commentary*. Ed. F.F. Bruce Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 1986: 1347.
16. Morris, L. *The first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1983:102.
17. Wright, D.F. "The Metaphysics of Sexuality." In *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Edited by G.F. Hawthorne and R.P. Martin. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1993: 871.
18. Gaebelein, F.E. and Douglas J.D. "1 Corinthians" In *Expositors Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1973.
19. Wright, D.F. *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*: 872.
20. Baclay, W. *The Letter to the Corinthians*. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1956: 66.
21. Leon Morris, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1983.
22. Short, J. and Craig, C.T. "1 Corinthians", In *The Interpreters Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980: 79.
23. Metz, D.S. "1 Corinthians" In *Beacon Bible Commentary*. Edited by A.F. Harper, Kansas: Beacon Hill Press, 1968: 374.
24. Berry, G.R. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Barker Book House, 1991: 447.
25. Berry, G.R. *Interlinear Greek English New Testament*.
26. Friberg, B. and T. Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984: 522.
27. Berry, G.R. *Interlinear Greek English New Testament*: 121.

28. Arndt, W.F. and W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*. Chicago: Oxford University Press, 1957: 38.
29. Rienecker, F. *A Linguistic Keynote to Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 1980: 88.
30. Ige, Abiodun Simeon. "Implications of the Culture of Pooling Resources: Illustration from Africa and Acts 4:34 – 37" *Nigeria Journal of Indigenous Knowledge and Development* Volume 2, September, 2009:103 – 111.
31. "Myth". A story told by Prof. Peter Ade Dopamu in one of his lectures on Africa Traditional Religion when I was a student at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria in 1991.
32. Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday Anchor book, 1970: 33
33. Bolaji, Idowu E. *Olòdùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman group Limited, 1970: 138-139.