

Sexuality and marriage: Guidelines for the twenty-first century.

by

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SUMMARY

The research commences by explaining the relevance and importance of marriage in the post-modern world although the post-modern era is known for disregarding pre-modern norms and customs. Marriage as traditionally known in the church is no exception. Communities no longer share the church's strict rules when it comes to relationships. Church teaching about sex seems contradictory; on the one hand it regards sex as sinful, while on the other hand it preaches that it should be saved for the person you love (Berry 2005:15).

Modern society's expectations are very different from Biblical times. Unlike Biblical times where adolescents got married between the age of fourteen and eighteen, modern day couples rarely get married before they reach their mid-twenties. The implication of this is that the youth should live in abstinence for a decade or more although they are physically mature. The question is whether it is realistic of society to expect long-term couples not to have a sexual relationship. Modern society questions the fact that traditional marriage should be seen as the only moral and lawful option where a permanent love relationship between two people may exist.

Throughout history sex was usually portrayed as something wrong, shameful, even sometimes as sin. "After sexual intercourse both man and woman had to bath, and they remained unclean until evening" (Lev. 15:18). The negative view on sexual intimacy continued in the early church, where they taught that sex is meant for procreation and not for enjoyment. Sex was always treated as something that should not be talked about, especially not in church. Although most of these views have been overcome in the last few decades the church is faced with new challenges in the present milieu such as sex before marriage, cohabitation and homosexuality.

According to Van Eck (2007a:81) marriage as institution in modern society is in crisis. Additionally the guidance that the church provides on this matter might be in worse crisis, particularly the Church's silence and lack of guidance regarding cohabiting relationships and pre-marital sex.

The revolution of marriage is investigated to understand its development over the last two thousand years. Biblical text is studied in search of guidelines for young adults on the matters of sexuality and marriage. A look into modern day ethics will give us an idea of the challenges the Church face on this subject.

The universal importance of marriage, the diversity and complexity of social and cultural circumstances, the needs within society and the church, and the quest for Scriptural moral guidance necessitates this research. This study seeks to investigate whether modern-day non-marital sexual relationships should be accepted in the Church and to suggest guidelines for young adults on the matters of sex and marriage in order to make Christian based meaningful life choices. The purpose of this study is to find Biblical guidelines in an attempt to find a link between spirituality and sexuality.

KEY WORDS

- Matrimony or marriage in today's terms is a social union or legal contract between people. It is an institution in which interpersonal relationships are acknowledged in a variety of ways, depending on the culture in which it is found. A union that is formalized via a wedding ceremony is called matrimony (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage>).
- Cohabitation implies an arrangement whereby two people decide to live together on a long-term or permanent basis in an emotionally and/or sexually intimate relationship. The term is most frequently applied to couples who are not married.
- Fidelity is the quality of being faithful or loyal. In modern human relationships, the term can refer to sexual monogamy. In western culture this often means devotion to marriage vows, or of promises of exclusivity or monogamy, and an absence of adultery (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidelity>).
- Promiscuity refers to indiscriminating casual sex with many sexual partners. What sexual behavior is considered "promiscuous" varies between cultures, with different standards often being applied to different genders and civil status (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promiscuity>).
- Betrothal as known in Biblical times is a formal state of engagement to be married.
- Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period. Modernity relates to the modern era and to modernism. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>).
- Post-modernity is generally used to describe the economic and/or cultural state or condition of society which is said to exist *after* modernity. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernity>).

- First-Century Mediterranean World is the world of the New Testament (Van Eck, 2007b:104).
- Hermeneutics refers to the study of the interpretation of Biblical texts.
- Deity, also religiously referred to as a god, is a recognized supernatural immortal being, who may be thought of as holy, divine, or sacred, held in high regard, and respected by believers.
- Dualistic: The view that the mind and body function separately, without interchange. The concept that humans have two basic natures, the physical and the spiritual and that they function separately. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/dualistic>
- Holistic view emphasizes the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. This view see a human being as a whole, body and soul. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/holistic>



ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen	Ecclesiastes	Ecc
Exodus	Exo	Song of Songs	Son
Leviticus	Lev	Isaiah	Isa
Numbers	Num	Jeremiah	Jer
Deuteronomy	Deu	Lamentations	Lam
Joshua	Jos	Ezekiel	Eze
Judges	Jdg	Daniel	Dan
Ruth	Rut	Hosea	Hos
1 Samuel	1Sa	Joel	Joe
2 Samuel	2Sa	Amos	Amo
1 Kings	1Ki	Obadiah	Oba
2 Kings	2Ki	Jonah	Jon
1 Chronicles	1Ch	Micah	Mic
2 Chronicles	2Ch	Nahum	Nah
Ezra	Ezr	Habakkuk	Hab
Nehemiah	Neh	Zephaniah	Zep
Esther	Est	Haggai	Hag
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zec
Psalms	Psa	Malachi	Mal
Proverbs	Pro		

New Testament

Matthew	Mat	1 Timothy	1Ti
Mark	Mar	2 Timothy	2Ti
Luke	Luk	Titus	Tit
John	Joh	Philemon	Phm
Acts	Act	Hebrews	Heb
Romans	Rom	James	Jam
1 Corinthians	1Co	1 Peter	1Pe
2 Corinthians	2Co	2 Peter	2Pe
Galatians	Gal	1 John	1Jo
Ephesians	Eph	2 John	2Jo
Philippians	Phi	3 John	3Jo
Colossians	Col	Jude	Jud
1 Thessalonians	1Th	Revelation	Rev
2 Thessalonians	2Th		

DECLARATION

I, Maria Elizabeth Tukker declare that the thesis, *Marriage and sexuality; Guidelines for the Twenty-First Century*, which I hereby submit for the degree MA (Biblical and religious studies) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The link between sex and religion is well documented. Carl Jung once remarked that when people brought sexual questions to him they usually turned out to be religious, and when they brought religious questions to him they normally turned out to be sexual (Nelson 1979:14). Mankind is fascinated with sexual topics, especially marriage.

Marriage is still very relevant in the postmodern world, although attitudes towards sexuality are undergoing dramatic changes in Western society. The post-modern era is known for disregarding pre-modern norms and customs, for instance the church language, songs sung in church, traditional methods of preaching and so forth. Marriage as traditionally known in the church is no exception. The traditional perception of marriage is something that today's youth will not identify with and it is far from what is actually happening in the real world. Communities no longer share the church's strict rules when it comes to relationships. Cohabiting couples are nowadays hardly frowned upon anywhere in the world. The increasing divorce rate gives marriage a bad name with the number of victims it leaves behind.

In pre-modern times general laws allowed children who were sexually mature, usually between the age of twelve and fourteen, to get married. This means that relatively little time passed from when a person became sexually mature to the time he or she got married. In modern and post-modern times this picture changed drastically (Van Wyk 2002:274). Even until a few decades ago the average age to get married was between seventeen and twenty-three. Modern society expects full development and the highest level of education possible for adolescents before marriage. This means couples rarely get married before they reach their mid-twenties. The implication of this is that the youth should live in abstinence for a decade or more although they are physically mature. With this background in mind, the question is whether it is realistic of society to expect couples who have been in a relationship for years or who are even engaged but not married, because of social and/or economic reasons, not to have a sexual relationship.

Sex before marriage and cohabitation, has become part of our society. There are many political and sociological causes for changing patterns of relationships, but there is also a changing paradigm in the way we think about sex and marriage. Where does the parental example and the preaching of the church fit into the post-modern world? The Bible has no guidelines for us about the marriage ceremony or the right age to get married (Thatcher 1999:28).

1.2 Actuality and Relevance

What is marriage? Is the modern perception of marriage the same as the Bible's? Today's generation would define marriage as the public declaration of two people's love for each other in a church in front of loved ones, and their agreement to be bound together by the state. Wikipedia (2009) states that "Marriage is an interpersonal relationship (usually intimate and sexual) with governmental, social, or religious recognition. It is often created as a contract or through civil processes."

Is this all there is to it? Finding someone (after being with many that didn't work out), promising to never leave that person, signing the papers that go with it and now you're set? Is this what God had in mind when He talks about marriage, only the ceremony and papers that seal the deal? Is marriage, as it is known today, created by God or is it something manmade?

During the past decades marriage, as traditional institution, underwent drastic change in most European societies. Yet, most people still value the partnership of marriage. Changes include for instance that people get married later in life. Most commonly educational standards are higher and take longer to achieve, therefore many people are only able to generate an income in their late twenties or even thirties. How is a young Christian supposed to deal with this situation? Does the 'line theory' still carry any weight, where sex before the marriage is sin but thereafter a wonderful gift from God (Müller 2007:375)?

One of the main problems Christian sexual ethics has to deal with today is the question whether the church should acknowledge and bless unmarried long-term

relationships. Biblical traditions already illustrate that this institution is changing and subject to development. For many people marriage isn't the beginning of an intimate relationship anymore. Rather, it is seen as part of the process after a couple have lived together for a number of years and maybe want to start a family. A couple who live together out of wedlock should not be criticized, but rather be questioned on whether they live together responsibly (Haspel 2007:268).

1.3 Problem Statement

Church teaching about sex seems contradictory; on the one hand it regards sex as sinful, while on the other hand it preaches that it should be saved for the person you love (Berry 2005:15). People are encouraged to remain chaste until they marry and then share this beautiful experience with the forever-spouse. For centuries this was the attitude of the church towards sex, something that is wrong before marriage but thereafter a beautiful gift from God. Nowadays the picture is quite the opposite. After the 1960's sexual revolution, sex became something casual. In rebellion to these strict rules, society became obsessed with sexuality and everything associated with it. Sex before marriage, cohabitation and one night stands are common these days.

A 2005 study among South African university students sought to ascertain sexual practices and attitude toward pre-marital sex. The sample comprised 117 female and 36 male undergraduates with average age of 19.7 years. Results showed that half of the participants had sex in the past 12 months. Although two-thirds reported that between 18 and 21 years was a good age to have sex, only 43% approved of sex before marriage (Mwaba 2005; Naidoo 2005).

The majority of young people in the USA will agree that it is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to determine whether they really get along. Cohabitation is seen as a 'trial marriage' that offers the opportunity for leaving the trial, in case it yields unsatisfactory results (Thatcher 2002:11). Yet it has been proven that cohabiting couples easily leave their partners and then search for the next partner who would be willing to live together. It is in this way that the Scriptural ideal of monogamy is violated (Die Hervormer, Aug, 2003:5).

It is clear that pre-marital sex and cohabitation is becoming more common each day. Although South African youth no longer criticize pre-marital sex as their parents did, most will agree that they only want to get married once, because the Bible states that divorce and adultery are sins. Is sex seen as part of the trial-marriage; something that could be practised without a marriage licence? Or was the 'rule' that sex may only be practised within a marriage applicable only to a certain era?

"The term 'marital norm' conveys the conviction that, within the Christian faith, marriage is the norm (but not necessarily the rule) for full sexual experience" (Thatcher 2002:76).

Young minds are trying to make sense of sex and how to deal with it. Some argue that the Bible never says that you have to be married to have sex. However, a believer in Jesus Christ cannot use today's society as a barometer by which to measure immorality. What guidelines could be given to people who want to follow God's values and demands but at the same time are stuck in a sex-obsessed society?

Couples find themselves in the dilemma that they can only get married long after they have become sexually mature. This gap between sexual and social maturity increases over time. How do Christians deal with this dilemma? A middle ground needs to be found between the past, where sex was wrong and shameful, and the present, where it seems as though anything goes. Society has a responsibility towards young people to guide them sensitively and meaningfully to develop healthy sexual relationships (Van Wyk 2002:279).

The universal importance of marriage, the diversity and complexity of social and cultural circumstances, the needs within society and the church, and the quest for Scriptural moral guidance necessitates this research. The study attempts to create awareness that the church has no choice but to review its traditional stance.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

Kaiser (1992:289) raises the question whether the Bible still provides the foundation for ethical and moral life of Christians in the modern world. If the Bible is still the foundation, he asks, why is it silent on great ethical questions? While questions around sexual ethics still play a role in society, the church shows that the Bible doesn't necessarily offer straight-forward solutions (Songca 1997:25).

Norms and values are subject to change over time. The modern day norm system is very different from what was considered right and wrong in the Bible (Müller 2007:379). The documents of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, (*In Liefde Trouw zijn*) - call for distinction between contextual norms, which are formulated in each time period, and the basic values that are found in the Bible. It is thus necessary to re-evaluate what the Bible says about marriage and sex in today's context.

Most young adults will experience a few serious relationships where there is love, plus the other four ingredients (later discussed) between the partners. An assumption could be made that, before marrying the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, one would have been in a number of sexual relationships beforehand. Could Müller's guidelines be enough for people to make responsible decisions concerning their sexual partner? Emotional maturity should most certainly play a role in this serious matter. A sixteen or eighteen year old could think that these principles are present in his/her relationship. Could there be an age limit in this theory?

This study aims to determine what the Bible says about sex and marriage and what God would approve of as a healthy marriage. If a statement was made that by having sex with someone proposes that you are married to that person in God's eyes, what would that mean to young adults? Could it be said that you are married to each person that you sleep with? What then would be the purpose of trying to find the perfect person to spend the rest of your life with, if you were 'married' to each individual you had sex with before.

Statistics on pre-marital sex in the past few years provide some idea of how society is changing, setting the norm for the next generation. The study will attempt to trace the evolution of marriage and determine values that are essential for a responsible and sensible life that God will still approve of.

There are many questions and assumptions like these that derive from groups of various backgrounds, with certain presuppositions. The purpose of this study is not to provide simplistic answers on questions like these but rather to suggest guidelines on the matters of sex and marriage. Maybe the Biblical guidelines are so vague that it is open to interpretation for every generation to bend the rules in order to suit their needs? The question is: can the Bible accommodate the modern generation?

1.5 Research question

When does a marriage begin? Presumably Adam and Eve were married in God's eyes, however, no preacher or lawyer were present to make the marriage official either religiously or legally. What then constitutes marriage?

Mr. J.J. Viljoen, a former preacher of the GKSA, writes in *Beeld* (Dec. 15, 2009) about his experiences as a preacher. He tells the story of a young couple who wanted to join the church but were rejected, because they were living together and shared children, but were not married. The church committee stipulated that the couple should live separately for a period of time, after which they should get married and baptise their two children, before they would be accepted as members of the church and which would allow them the Holy Communion. The fact that these two people were committed to each other for the past ten years, raised their children as believers and worked hard to preserve their family was never considered. Needless to say the family did not join the church. During his years of service in the church, Mr Viljoen had to council numerous couples whose 'papers' were in order but whose marriages had fallen apart a long time ago. And yet their places in the church and seats at the table for the Holy Communion were guaranteed. The question is: which couple was truly married in God's eyes (*Beeld*, 15 December 2009)?

1.6 Methodology

The current research will be restricted to the results of the most recent authoritative sources and will be considered in the field of the Old and New Testaments. The research strategy is purely a literature study, aimed at discovering a hermeneutical key to understand and implement Biblical norms for the present.

1.7 Hypothesis

God and sex are rarely mentioned in the same sentence, yet people still have a deep need for spirituality, to experience God in their lives as well as for erotic guidance. How does the practice of sexuality make spiritual sense and how does the practice of spirituality make sexual sense? One way to answer this question is to attempt to find a link between spirituality and sexuality. In this way, spirituality could gain relevance and expressing one's sexuality could find a foundation. A search for Biblical guidelines is thus necessary in an attempt to find a link between spirituality and sexuality.

1.8 Chapter division

The first chapter will cover the introduction, background and actuality of this research. Methodologies for finding Biblical guidelines on sex and marriage and how to apply such guidelines in modern society will be discussed.

Chapter 2 will consider the meaning of sexuality in the Bible and in modern times. Why do Christians see sex as dirty and wrong when it is something that God gave to humans to enjoy?

Chapter 3 will deal with marriage; the meaning, importance and origin of marriage. It will review marriage in the Bible and the different marriage models of Adrian Thatcher (1999:30-104). A brief history of the various marriage strategies will indicate that marriage changed over the years and that it might be ever changing according to the standards and customs of society.

Chapter 4 will focus on the development of marriage. The research will consider how the concept of marriage developed over time in the Old Testament and if it has changed since New Testament times. The customs of the first-century Mediterranean world and the impact of their culture on marriage will be investigated.

In Chapter 5 various passages from the Old and New Testaments on the subject of marriage will be reviewed, to extract values and guidelines that might be of relevance for modern day society.

Chapter 6 will focus on Biblical values, how they could be implemented in modern day society and whether they would provide answers to previously stated questions. The extent to which society should influence our decision-making on sex and marriage, and the adaptation of certain principles to suit societal needs will be discussed.

Chapter 7 will conclude with a short summary and discussion of the findings on the subjects of sex and marriage. Possible solutions for the ethical dilemma of modern society will be considered and guidelines for young adults on sex and marriage will be proposed.

1.9 Hermeneutic starting point and interpretation

People read and understand the Bible in different ways, which is why there are so many different churches and groups who all believe differently. So whose interpretation is right? Why don't all believers understand the Bible in the same way? If the Bible is inspired by God, why are there so many different interpretations? Why didn't God express Himself more clearly in the Bible? Does God talk through the Bible? If so, why are there so many people hearing different things?

This study goes out from the hermeneutic starting point that culture and upbringing plays a major role in how the Bible is interpreted. For Protestants the Bible has always had the final authority regarding issues of faith and human behaviour. *Sola*

Scriptura is a reformed principle that describes the Bible as the most significant revelation and norm source (Dorey 2003:23-24).

1.9.1 Biblical interpretation

Christians commonly attest to the Bible as the Word of God, but this concept has different meanings for different people. To say that the Bible has authority requires faith in it. The Bible does not have authority for those who don't acknowledge its authority. For the voice of God to be heard through the Bible, doesn't depend on the Bible itself, but on the reader and his relationship with God.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit does not mean that God dictated a book without flaws (Deist 1979:59-63). The concept of 'Inspiration' (by the Holy Spirit) means that God gave the writer or witness the calling or desire to write down the knowledge they gained about God through personal experience and observation during their lifetime (within their own cultural historic background), to share it with future generations (Dorey 2003:27).

“... the Bible, read as Holy Scripture, on the one hand ranks as a normative text, yet on the other hand it cannot be claimed as a direct source of theological ethics. The Scripture is the normalizing authority, as far as it envisions the Word of God, but not in terms of a law code. The Scripture has the status of a source and has exemplary significance for the ethical formation of an opinion.”

(Kortner 2008:210)

Christians are not expected to all agree in their understanding of the Bible. It is expected that readers will assign their own interpretation to the text, according to their context and circumstances.

The interpretation of text is further influenced by the socio-economic and cultural background of the reader. Thus no one can claim to have the only correct understanding of the Scripture. All exegetes should stay humble and remember that

what they know is temporary and no one will ever understand and know the Bible completely.

Moral–ethical subjects like marriage, sex, homosexuality, etc. should be interpreted according to the cultural historical background of the Bible. It should be kept in mind that the Bible is not a science or history book but one that tells the story of God’s love for His children. The Bible doesn’t give answers to all the questions that humans come up with. It is a book of faith that includes matters that are important for Christians to boost their faith and give guidance to living a meaningful life (Dorey 2003: 28).

1.10 Technical terms

- Ethnocentrism is the tendency to believe that one's ethnic or cultural group is centrally important. The ethnocentric individual will judge other groups relative to his or her own particular ethnic group or culture, especially with regard to language, behaviour, customs and religion.

Cultural ethnocentrism occurs when a ‘modern’ reader reads ancient texts with the notion that the culture ‘here and now’ is still exactly the same as it was ‘then and there’, in other words, the institution of marriage in the ancient Mediterranean world is understood as it is today (Van Eck 2007b:119-120).

- The First-Century Mediterranean World is the world of the New Testament (Van Eck 2007b:104). The first century after Christ in Ancient Near East Mesopotamia and surrounds. The ancient Near East is considered the cradle of civilization.
- Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period. Modernity relates to the modern era and to modernism. Modernity may also refer to tendencies in intellectual culture, particularly the movements intertwined with secularisation and post-industrial life. In context, modernity has been associated with cultural and intellectual movements of 1436—1789 and extending to the 1970s or later. Modernity is defined as a period or

condition loosely identified with the Progressive Era, the Industrial Revolution, or the Enlightenment (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>).

- Post-modernity is generally used to describe the economic and/or cultural state or condition of society which is said to exist *after* modernity. In philosophy and critical theory *postmodernity* refers to the state or condition of society which is said to exist *after* modernity, a historical condition that marks the reasons for the end of modernity. Postmodernism present a radically different way of looking at life (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernity>). Postmodernism is characterised by liberal ethics that leaves objectivity behind to make room for personal experience and growth.

CHAPTER 2 SEXUALITY

2.1 Understanding sexuality

There are many ways in which to describe sexuality. Commonly sexuality could be defined as the feelings and behaviour of a person regarding sex, which includes sexual behaviour and sexual desires (Carroll & Wolpe 1996).

However, closer investigation suggests that human sexuality includes all that we are as human beings. Sexuality at the very least is biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual. It is as much of the mind as of the body, of the community as of the person. To be a person is to be a sexual being (Tenth General Convention of the American Lutheran Church – Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior).

A person's sexuality isn't simply coincidence; people are influenced by everything around them which informs their understanding of themselves and the topic in general. Parents are the most important role models that shape children's basic understanding of sexuality and establish the image they have of themselves and how they view others. Identity and sexuality is inextricably linked to each other. In a child's growing process he/she becomes aware of his/her own body. Sexuality awareness develops. A person discovers that his/her identity is the cloth that covers his/her nakedness. The naked truth of his/her sexuality helps develop his/her own identity. A person is a sexual being, therefore sexuality is a fundamental part of being human (Steyn 2007:138).

Human sexuality is not simply imposed by instinct or stereotype conducts, as happens in animals, but it is influenced both by mental activity and by social, cultural, educational and normative characteristics of the environment in which people grow up and develop their personality. Consequently, the analysis of the sexual sphere must be based on the convergence of several lines of development such as affectivity, emotions and relations (Boccardo & Carulli 2008:17).

Sexuality is a complicated aspect of our personality. People differ significantly in the way they understand and express their sexuality. Every person has an individual norm structure based on their upbringing and experiences. Until recently, society's

intolerance towards anyone who was not of the sexual 'norm', caused many people to suppress their real sexuality. This view has softened over the last 20 years and people are more open about their sexuality. Modern society acknowledges that sexuality is complex and cannot always be simply labelled (<http://health.ninemsn.com.au/family/familyhealth/689611/sexuality>)

There are many ethical questions concerning sexuality. What is normal? Is sex out of wedlock sin? Is pornography sin? What about oral sex and masturbation? Polygamy is found in the Bible, is it therefore allowed? What about birth control? Is HIV God's punishment for sexual sin? Although these questions and many others are all valid, it would be tragic if they were seen as the alpha and omega when contemplating the relationship between religion and sexuality. The core of the unity between religion and sexuality would be missed if this were the case (Scheffler 2008:1257). However, if the unity between religion and sexuality is acknowledged, these questions become redundant. It is based on the same principle as Jesus' summary of the law: if you love God and you love your neighbour, obeying the remainder of the law (regarding murder, false witness, divorce, etc) will come naturally (Scheffler 2008:1258).

2.2 Meaning of the sex act

To understand sex and events in general it is necessary to look at meaning itself and how meaning evolves. All events carry meaning, as they form part of a larger context. No event or human act has significance simply by itself. All acts occur within a context and are dependent on their context for their meaning. In the same way the meaning of sexual intercourse is dependent on the context in which it occurs and on the intent of the persons involved. The sex act cannot be separated from the human being who engages in it. The sex act draws its meaning from the persons who create a context for the action (Grenz 1990:80).

For Christians, sex should be understood within the context of Christian life as a whole. What does the sex act say about the self, the nature of life and ultimately about God. For Christians the fundamental meaning of sex is that it is practiced

within an ever binding love under the lordship of Jesus Christ, namely marriage (Grenz 1990:81).

The modern era offers a different understanding for the meaning of sex that goes beyond the context of marriage. This understanding is often drawn from aspects of Christian doctrine, although the full meaning given to the act as an expression of the whole person is trimmed down. Some defend the sex act by saying it is self-expression or self-actualization and according to them these are values superior to the values of innocence and purity (Grenz 1990:79). Others say that sex is a purely bodily sphere and that sex should be seen as a function of the body that could be satisfied without any other attachments. Intercourse doesn't carry any other meaning beyond the fact that it is purely physical (Grenz 1990:79).

Today these viewpoints are welcomed, allowing a person to engage in sex freely with few restraints, if so desired. As a matter of fact, for personal well-being we ought to give expression to our human sexual needs (Grenz 1990:79).

These attitudes towards sex are conflicting with the Christian understanding of the nature of sex. The assumption that body and soul can function separately are against Christian beliefs. Paul warns the Corinthian Christians to honour God with their body. To use, or rather misuse, sex in this way is denying your own and your partner's humanity as an embodied being (Grenz 1990:80).

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 existence (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

2.3 What could be the Social purpose of our Creation as Sexual Beings?

“Through a sexual act a human being is born and from the very beginning is socially dependant on others in order to survive and grow. At the end of life human beings revert back to a state of dependence upon others. Although kinship remains till today a basic

structure for human sociality, human sexuality is not just a matter of family and biology. It is to me most of all an individual characteristic of being human. It is an aspect of personal identity.”

(Dreyer 2008:724)

God created us as sexual beings with the purpose of bonding. The most powerful statement of the relationship between sexuality and bonding is in Genesis 2. God makes a helper suitable for Adam. In contrast to his response to the animals, Adam immediately senses a bond with her (Grenz, 1990:32). “Woman is her name because she was taken out of man” (vers. 23). “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one” (Vers. 24). Could we call this male-female phenomenon marriage?

Most people will agree that at some point in one’s life everyone searches for a soul mate or someone they feel connected to or who shares a special bond with him/her. Humans are programmed to live in pairs. From a young age the desire to have people close to you is programmed in our systems. The drive to bond leads to the development of social communities that begins with marriage, family, tribe and finally larger societies (Grenz 1990:36).

A person’s attitudes and actions regarding sexual expression are related to one’s personal ethics. A lifestyle of fidelity or infidelity reveals a person’s fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of humankind. Fidelity or infidelity is related to a person’s understanding concerning the nature of the Divine reality. The covenant between male and female in the fellowship of marriage constitutes a fitting similarity of the relationship between God and the church (Eph. 5:22-33). Faithfulness between spouses proclaims their faith in the faithfulness of God to His people. To practise fidelity is to offer a profound declaration of the fundamental faithfulness of God (Grenz 1990: 113-114).

Modern Western culture often promotes a view of sex completely opposed to what the Bible teaches. This view makes sex appear to be nothing more than animal instinct. These days it is not only men that are portrayed this way but television

makes women appear as sexual creatures who are able to separate love and marriage from the sex act. However, Biblical teachings on sexuality are far from what modern culture makes people to believe is normal.

2.4 Erotica and spirituality

The term 'erotic' is derived from the Greek word *eros*, which comes from the Greek god of love and desire, Eros. This term includes both hetero- and homosexual love. Eros was the son of Aphrodite (goddess of love and sexuality) and her lover Ares (war god). Eros is described as an attractive, athletic but naughty young man, equipped with a bow and arrow which he uses to aim at men (Latin equivalent Cupid). Eros is seen as the source of attraction and desire of sexual love (Veldsman 2007:304).

Sigmund Freud didn't see Eros as a god but rather as a strong energy that determined human behaviour. Freud associated Eros with his concept of libido, a combination of sexual drive and vitality. Some Greek philosophers believed that Eros was the power behind all creation and that his absence would lead to decay and destruction (Marchetti-Mercer 2007:347).

God and sexuality are not mentioned in the same sentence. For the prejudiced it is disrespectful. For those who grew past faith it is irrelevant. Spirituality and erotica are rarely found in the same bed, yet people still have a deep need for spirituality, to experience God in their lives as well as for erotic guidance. The challenge would be to interlink the growing desire for spirituality with the growing need for erotic guidance. In this way, spirituality could gain relevance and erotica find a foundation (Van Niekerk 2007:315).

Erotica could be described as the force behind sexual arousal and response. The book Song of Songs is a unique collection of erotic songs from more than two thousand years ago. Where the rest of the Bible accept sexuality as something natural, yet often warn against the erotic, Song of Songs is throughout positive about the erotic and see it as a form of art. In Song of Songs a kiss for example is the only place in the Bible where it is seen as an erotic act (Van Niekerk 2007:324).

2.5 Sexuality in Biblical times

Christian's main source of moral guidelines is the Bible. We still want to test our lives against the Bible although our circumstances are so different. Old Testament culture and modern day culture are poles apart. There are numerous Old Testament rituals and customs that simply cannot be followed by the twenty first century person.

Several aspects of sexuality and erotica existed in the ancient Near East. Sexuality can be found within marriage as well as out of wedlock. Hetero- and homosexuality, prostitution, sodomy, transvestism, necrophilia, zoo-philia, and pederasty existed. Although all these forms of sexuality existed, it was judged at different stages in ancient time intervals in different ways (Human 2006:3).

What the Bible says about sex and marriage in the ancient Mediterranean context isn't nearly the same as what is meant with marriage in today's post modern context. The Bible isn't exactly prude when it comes to sex. Sex is a gift from God that should be enjoyed, not something that should provoke shame or guilt (Le Roux 2010:1).

In the Ancient Near East there were a number of rituals that promoted fertility. A farmer for example often had sex with his wife on his crop fields to encourage and stimulate growth of a good harvest. 'Holy marriages' were performed on New Year's Day between the king and a priestess; this was symbolic to promote fertility of crop fields, gardens and tree plantations. The ritual didn't necessarily mean that they were married but remained a symbolic act (Human 2007:33).

Homosexuality today is very different from the few references we find in the Bible on the subject. In Biblical times sex was the most significant tool for a man to retain his honour. In the patriarchal culture of the Ancient Near East it was shameful to take the place of a woman in public. Sex was used as a power tool, to shame others and to gain honour. This had little to do with sexual attraction between men (Human 2007:38).

2.6 Purity and dirtiness in the Bible

Purity and the practices that rendered people clean or unclean cannot be underestimated in the Old Testament. A person was either clean or unclean at any given moment. Leviticus has numerous rules on what made a person unclean and for the period of time the person would remain unclean. These rules prescribed what should not be eaten, for example, neither fat of cattle, sheep or goats nor any animal with split hooves. The touching of a dead animal or any skin diseases made a person unclean. A man was considered unclean every time he ejaculated, a menstruating woman was unclean for seven days and anyone who touched her would be unclean till evening. Even a woman who gave birth to a baby was considered unclean (Berry 2005:26-30).

Unfortunately these rules included sexual intercourse, and made sex something unclean or 'dirty'. "After sexual intercourse both man and woman had to bath, and they remained unclean until evening" (Lev. 15:18). For many, scriptures like these are an indication that sex is wrong and sinful, although culture clearly played a part in these laws. Today people eat the fat of cattle and sheep, as well as animals with split hooves widely. People with skin diseases are no longer considered unclean, yet somehow sex retained the stigma of wrongness and sinfulness.

2.7 Song of Songs on sexuality

Song of Songs is mostly interpreted as the relationship between God and Israel or between Christ and the Church. According to these interpretations Song of Songs is not about sexuality or sexual love, but rather about a-sexual-religion, or "holy, godly love" (Scheffler 2008:1265). Song of Songs is sexually extremely explicit by openly referring to the naked male and female bodies, especially their sexual organs, and to sexual activities. There are no traces in the book to suggest that these acts should be interpreted as God's relationship with His people. In fact, there is no reference at all to God in the book (Scheffler 2008:1265).

Perhaps the clearest biblical teaching on sexuality is found in Song of Songs. This book portrays a man and a woman who are desperately in love with each other.

“How beautiful you are, my love; how your eyes shine with love! How handsome you are, my dearest; how you delight me!” (Song of Songs 1:15-16). They yearn to be together, but not simply for the sake of sexual gratification. They want to be together because they are in love, and the sex they enjoy with one another is an expression of that love. Their mutual attraction is not primarily hormonal.

If Song of Songs were to be read as a textbook on how to have sex, Solomon’s intent would be misunderstood. The book is a guide on how to build a loving, intimate relationship. The ultimate purpose of sex, then, is to provide ultimate intimacy between a husband and wife. There is no greater expression of vulnerable intimacy between human beings, and this is a large part of what makes marriage so unique (<http://www.challies.com/archives/articles/biblical-perspe.php>).

“Your lips cover me with kisses; your love is better than wine,” is the opening line of Song of Songs (Song of Songs 1:2). It sounds exciting, but could this centuries-old song shed some light on relationships in the 21st century? There is plenty to learn from this book. Songs of Solomon is considered the greatest love poem ever written (Du Toit 2007:121).

The way the Bible talks about the love between a man and a woman is surprising. On the subject of sexuality and marriage people often expect the Bible to have a set of instructions, do’s and don’ts, rules and regulations. In Song of Songs however, it is surprising to note that sexuality and marriage is praised. It is after all not a narrative, nor a lecture – it is a song, in fact it is named in the superlative: Song of Songs. We are invited to celebrate love - to join in, and sing and dance and be joyful about love, and to be amazed that people are capable of loving each other. This poetry holds a timelessness that speaks straight to the heart. And where love is being celebrated, it brings us closer to the mystery of being human, the secret of life itself (Du Toit 2007:122).

Senses play an important role in Song of Songs, the couple are listening, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching. And through it all there is a passion present that leaves one speechless. Christians often feel that the Bible is against physical desire and sexual feelings. They tend to see sexual desires as sinful and that passion leads

to seduction. This is not the case; indeed Song of Songs portrays passion as something beautiful and powerful (Du Toit 2007:123).

The main theme of the book Song of Songs is that the couple belong to one another. Only in the exclusiveness of their relationship and in the security of the mutual - I belong to you and you belong to me - is this love that they share, possible. This exclusiveness is also expressed in other ways, for example that his beloved is unique, one of a kind that happens once in a lifetime only. For her beloved, she is irreplaceable (Du Toit 2007:125).

A love relationship includes the entire human existence – your heart, thoughts, body and ultimately your life. And often emotions are contradicting: joy and yearning, pride and shyness, self-confidence and uncertainty. All this and more are part of the Song of Songs love experience. These different features of love are seen in the themes that occur throughout the songs; longing, desire, attracting calls, admiring, wonder, spring cheer, enjoying erotic playfulness, the uniqueness of the beloved etc (Du Toit 2007:126).

The longing for each other has to do with the deep appreciation that they have for one another. Both appreciate the other's beauty, which leads to praising and admiring one another. The enjoyment of erotica and lovemaking is repeated in Song of Songs. There are a number of love metaphors relating to sexual enjoyment: drinking of wine, eating fruit, enjoying the garden, lilies etc – all of these are metaphors for physical caressing.

In the opening phrase the girl compares her beloved's caressing with *wine*. In this comparison it is probably about the intoxicating power of wine and the pleasant feelings wine cause. It almost drugs her but also makes her extremely happy. The *garden* refers to her – to her body, her sexuality, her caressing. The fact that the garden is also referred to as a private, secret garden is aligned to the main theme of the book – that they belong to one another and that this garden is not meant for any other visitors. Promiscuity is excluded and sexual pleasures are available only for her beloved. She saves the fruit for her beloved; this too forms part of the ongoing theme, namely that the game of love is played by the two of them, to the exclusion of everyone else. That fact that she saves the fruit for him could also be an indication of

her purity; she hasn't shared fruit with anyone else. The desire to caress each other is seen throughout the book, although they are sometimes frustrated when the taboos of their society keep them from freely and openly expressing their love for each other. It was not allowed to embrace your beloved in public in their patriarchal society. The woman speaks out against this custom and tries to think of ways to get past that (Du Toit 2007:128-132).

"I wish that you were my brother,
that my mother had nursed you at her breast.
Then, if I met you in the street,
I could kiss you and no one would mind" (Song of Songs 8:1).

Song of Songs acknowledges that in the world love relationships might encounter resistance, whether from people or from circumstances, and that there will be problems to overcome. These problems are referred to as little foxes that might ruin a young love. It is probably the workers in the vineyard who warn them against the foxes, to catch them before they harmed their relationship. The foxes might refer to people or things, to anything that might damage their relationship or even destroy it. Foxes, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem, shouldn't be allowed to wound something so special (Du Toit 2007:134-135).

"Catch the foxes, the little foxes,
before they ruin our vineyard in bloom" (Song of Songs 2:15).

To create a safe environment for erotica and lovemaking, love, trust, care and commitment should be present. If this is the case it would be understood that *eros* not only imply sexuality but also sensuality; that the atmosphere in which sex takes place is just as important as the sex itself. Song of Songs talks about a love that should be celebrated but also holds a calling. We celebrate love, because when we love, we live. That is why we live with enthusiasm and passion, but also with gratitude and amazement. This calling never ends; the duty of love isn't ever accomplished or completed. Therefore the end of the Song of Songs is open, unfinished (Du Toit 2007:136).

2.8 Sex within the marital bond

“It is marriage itself which establishes the connection between sex and love, between procreation and union, not each act of intercourse within it” (Thatcher 1999:103). The meaning of sex lies in the context in which it occurs. When sex is practised within an improper context it acquires a variety of negative meanings. When sexual intercourse becomes an expression of self-gratification, adultery, infidelity, or exploitation, the meaning is negative and usually harmful to those who practise it in this manner (Grenz 1990:82).

Biblical writers affirm the goodness of sexuality as God’s gift. Human beings are sexual creatures, and as sexual creatures they are called to honour God with their bodies (1 Cor. 6:15-20). Song of Songs declares sex as a source of pleasure for husband and wife. This gift of sexual activity is always located within the context of marital covenant (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003). Within the context of marital covenant, husband and wife are free to express love for each other, experience pleasure, and join in the procreative act of sexual union (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003). Joined to each other within this monogamous covenant, man and woman may be naked and not be ashamed (Gen. 2:25).

The divine intention with sex is to enjoy it within a divinely given context, namely, marriage (Grenz 1990:82). Sex within the marital bond is pleasing to God and is not to be a source of shame (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

2.9 The sex act as the Sacrament of marriage

2.9.1 What is a Sacrament?

A sacrament is a religious ceremony, instituted by Jesus Christ, regarded as an outward sign of an inward, spiritual grace (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003). The number of sacraments varies in Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church practises seven sacraments including marriage, while Protestant Churches recognize only two, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

A sacrament is “An outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace” (Morrow 1936:250). A sign is any visible object by which something is made known to human beings. In a sacramental marriage the visible sign is the couple who stand before God, pronouncing their marital vows. A sacrament is a holy gift, which confers blessings, and a saving grace to a Christian who receives it in good faith (Molapo 2004:95). Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (2003) explains that sacraments are not the automatic or mechanical transmission of divine grace, but that genuine faith issues forth in works of faith, although works do not result in the reception of grace.

“In the same way the estate of marriage is a sacrament. It is an outward and spiritual sign of the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed or ever will exist: the union of the divine and human natures in Christ” (Luther 1999: Vol 44:10).

“Marriage does not – like the sacraments – nourish and strengthen faith or prepare people for the life to come; but it is a secular order in which people can prove faith and love ...” (Buitendag 2007:445).

“According to Scripture, marriage does not have salvific power... Therefore marriage is not a sacrament like baptism... The question is what the value of marriage would then be. Clearly the value of marriage cannot be located in procreation any longer... Not in an over-populated world with inadequate support. The value of marriage can be located in fidelity and commitment... permanence and mutual fidelity of people who live in relationship with one another in the presence of God.”

(Dreyer 2008:733)

A sacrament is a physical act that seeks to give visible expression to a spiritual reality. The physical act of sexual intercourse can become a visible expression and symbolic seal of the marriage bond uniting husband and wife. The assertion that sex is the sacrament of marriage must be understood in a metaphorical sense only. It

serves as a way of describing the relationship between the sex act and the marital bond, and characterizes the meaning of both (Grenz 1990:83).

Within marriage the sex act can become a renewal, reaffirmation, symbolic epitome of the marriage vows. Sexual intercourse gives a visual representation of the vows the couple took on their wedding day.

The sex act can be regarded as a multi-dimensional enactment of the marital covenant:

- The covenant partners can give and receive freely
- The partners commit themselves to be transparent to each other, sharing deepest dreams, needs and goals.
- It includes total and unconditional acceptance.
- Sex is a visible enactment of these dimensions of the marriage covenant.
- In sexual intercourse intimacy is freely given and received.
- Sex is an act of physical transparency.
- Sexual intercourse is an act of total acceptance.

In the physical sex act a partner acknowledges and accepts the other for the person he or she is and reaffirm the commitment they made in their marriage vows to accept each other in all areas of life (Grenz 1990:85-86).

The fact that the sex act is also uniquely and intensely pleasurable shouldn't be left out. The Bible presents a pleasure affirming message. Evidence for this occurs in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Several of the Proverbs are devoted to the theme of finding true sexual pleasure. The book Song of Songs is best seen as an extended description of the celebrative dimension of sexuality. The literature is erotic and calibrates sexual pleasure and the attractiveness that a lover finds in the beloved. It provides an extended commentary on the beauty of the sex act within the context of marriage (Grenz 1990:87).

Marriage as a covenantal bond brings together the two aspects of love. The desire for each other and the physical attraction towards each other, which is called eros, can only truly be fulfilled in the total giving and unconditional acceptance of the other

person, called agape. When this is achieved, love in its highest form emerges (Grenz 1990:87).

2.10 Sex before marriage

“Despite centuries of religious and legal sanctions against premarital sex in many parts of the world, dramatic changes in sexual attitudes and behaviour have occurred during the second half of the twentieth century. Increasingly, sexual interactions have become a common and widely accepted part of romantic relationships” (Baron & Byrne 1997:297).

It is interesting to note that Christian traditions (and others) are generally more concerned with the *when* of sex than the *quality* (=religious nature) of sex. Parents, teachers and the church are more worried about sex outside wedlock than they are about loving, meaningful sex in marriages. Scheffler (2008) states that sex before marriage isn't the obvious cause of divorce, but rather the absence of good sex within marriages. Instead of rejecting, dooming or forbidding sex, preachers, psychiatrists and sexual counsellors should rather encourage people to experience their sexuality religiously and live accordingly.

Couples who are already living together should be encouraged to do so in love and to interpret their sexuality in a religious way instead of developing guilt feelings that push them away from the church. In the same way married couples shouldn't be left to their own fate, as long as they stay married at whatever cost. Their sexual relationship should be supported and encouraged. Precisely this would prevent divorce. Fellow Christians and counsellors must dedicate themselves to promote sex in marriages (where they probably could make a difference) rather than condemn sex before marriage (which they can't do anything about) (Scheffler 2008:1261).

2.11 Cohabitation

We live in the aftermath of a sexual revolution. Not surprisingly, public attitudes towards cohabitation have changed. “It is widely accepted that the stigma associated with living together outside marriage... has diminished considerably over the past

three or four decades. Indeed, for a growing majority, it has now all but disappeared” (Haskey 2001:4). There has been a growth in cohabitation as an alternative to, rather than a forerunner of marriage. Modern society worries less and less whether a couple who lives together is married or not. In South Africa it is proposed that the cohabitation rate has escalated by 100% each year from 1980 (Louw, van Ede & Louw 1998:586)

“Increasingly, couples who have started living together do not place a high priority on marrying, though they intend to do so; many view the cost of a ‘proper wedding’ as very expensive, particularly in the early days of a partnership when setting up home, and housing costs, can be demanding, even on two incomes. There perhaps has been a tendency for couples to defer considering when to marry until they feel they can afford it, when domestic arrangements have been settled and when they are ready for the large social occasion they wish it to be.”

(Haskey 2001:11)

On the other hand both married and unmarried sexual relationships may suffer breakdown. “It is probable that those who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce because as a group of people they hold different values about marriage as a lifelong commitment” (Dormor 1992:28). There is considerable evidence that cohabitation, excluding those that lead to marriage, last on average shorter than marriages. “Cohabiting unions are not as stable as marriages. This has been shown in almost every country for which we have available information, for example in Sweden in 1986 a cohabiting union was more than six times as likely to break up as a marriage” (Dormor 1992:28).

It has been observed that in cohabitations, the men are less committed to their female partners, and much less committed to their children, than in marriages (Thatcher 2002:13). This means that children in cohabiting families are more likely to experience family breakdown and new parental partnership.

2.12 Sexuality and interpersonal relationships

Sexuality is part of God's design for humanity. It is a human channel for the divine. *Song of Songs* describes in poetic form the sexual and love feelings of a man and a woman. Physical beauty which is the basis of sexual attraction is celebrated unashamedly and carries God's approval (Dominian 2001:9).

The fundamental truth of our existence is that human beings and God are both rooted in mutual self-giving love. To exist consists of being-in-relationship (Sheldrake 2001:29). Through God the divine in the experience of human sexual relations is manifested, this desire is called eros. Human relationships provide man's primary image of God in everyday terms. God *is* erotic power properly understood. God is our capacity to love, revealing itself in the context of all human relationships (Sheldrake 2001:31). When sexual union is the result of deep, exclusive and faithful love between two people, it may be a sacrament of a union with God (Sheldrake 2001:37).

2.12.1 Sexual intercourse as personal communication

Communication is a basic human need, everything that humans do communicate something to the world about themselves. Sexual intercourse has the ability to communicate different things to the partner.

2.12.1.1 Affirmation of identity

With every act of sexual intercourse couples say to each other, "I recognize you, I appreciate you, and I want you." Despite the passage of time, the couple need and want one another. Spouses continue to affirm each other by sexual intercourse; every time is a renewal of their marital vows (Dominian 2001:12). A further dimension of the covenant of marriage derives from the link between intercourse and procreation. The sex act is an expression of openness that may result in expanding their love into a new life and their marital bond into a family bond. Procreation is an important dimension of marital sexual relations but certainly not the only or central dimension (Grenz 1990:90-92).

2.12.1.2 Sexual identity

Sexual intercourse gives two verifications of the personality – the personal and the sexual. Through intercourse, a person shows their strengths and weaknesses of their masculinity and femininity and, genitally, they are telling each other what sort of person they are in their gender. Over time, the couple give to each other a perception of their personality (Dominian 2001:13).

2.12.1.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is gained from two sources, the feeling of being loveable and the worth of our achievements. Sexual intercourse has the ability to continually establish a feeling of self-worth, well-being and being loved in the space of a few minutes. Intercourse expresses physical erotic accomplishment and personal affirmation (Dominian 2001:14).

2.12.1.4 Submission

The concept of mutual submission within marriage is seen in Ephesians. “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.” (Eph. 5:22, 25) Paul also teaches about submission in sexual intercourse in 1 Cor. 7:3-7. “A wife is not the master of her own body, but her husband is; in the same way a husband is not the master of his own body, but his wife is. Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations” (1 Cor. 7:5).

The highest symbol of fellowship within marriage that expresses the willingness to give yourself freely for the sake of the pleasure and well-being of your spouse, is the sex act (Grenz 1990:89).

2.12.1.5 Relief of distress

Intercourse has a variety of relaxing attributes. It is a relaxing physical experience in which physical discomfort is relieved. Sexual intercourse also relieves psychological distress. There is no doubt that it can lift the mood (Dominian 2001:15).

2.12.1.6 Reconciliation

In case of quarrels, conflict or pain, sexual intercourse could act as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. At that moment the couple return to enter each other as lovers (Dominian 2001:15).

2.12.1.7 Thanksgiving

Sexual intercourse is the most powerful way of saying thank you to each other. Through intercourse a couple make themselves completely available to each other and express their thanks for being together, yesterday, today and hopefully tomorrow (Dominian 2001:15).

2.13 The relative value of sex

Although the sex act has been described as a meaningful and valuable symbolic act within the context of marriage, it shouldn't be seen as the beginning and end of a marriage. Marriage doesn't exist merely for the enjoyment of sexual intercourse. Marriage is not dependent on sexual intercourse for its well-being. There is far more to the marital relationship than sex (Grenz 1990:92).

2.14 Enjoyment of sex to the end of married life

Research determined that there are individuals who remain sexually active throughout their lives up to the age of a hundred years. With age the passion of youth subsides, while the presence of one's lover and his/ her gentle touch become more important. The significance of sex could intensify for a couple that has enjoyed a lifelong partnership within the marriage bond. Sex becomes an affirmation of a lifetime bond for a couple that have weathered the storms and enjoyed the beauty of a life together (Grenz 1990: 93).

2.15 Sexual ethics

Sexual ethics and sexual morality should be distinguished. Sexual morality refers to norms that are specific to a certain community from a certain time when they were declared valid and suitable. Sexual ethics on the other hand reflect on sexual

morality, sexual behaviour and social structures where sexuality is lived. Sexual ethics could be the foundation of sexual morality, but could also criticize it (Haspel 2007:271).

The topic of Christian sexual ethics raises various questions. How can Christian ethical principles be applied in different and changing social contexts? Where do these principles come from? Especially when it comes to ethics people often use certain Biblical texts literally in order to justify their specific viewpoint. When it comes to homosexuality or sex before marriage, it is expected that the Bible have direct normative statements against it, although the Bible doesn't say much about these topics at all. Therefore, when it comes to Christian sexual ethics the methodology is highlighted (Haspel 2007:263).

When we consult the New Testament on sexual ethics we encounter two obstacles; In the first place, an ethic that has equal authority to everyone doesn't exist. Secondly the New Testament isn't a text book on moral issues. The New Testament does not offer explicit ethics on gender roles, marriage or sexuality (Le Roux 2010:1).

The only real Christian ethic is love for God and love for your neighbour. Therefore we must apply this ethic on marriage and sexuality. *Agape* should be a nonnegotiable condition for any sexual relationship. Not all heterosexual marriages necessarily pass this test. The idea that all marital sex is acceptable and pre marital sex is wrong can no longer be simply accepted. The values and manner in which the relationship define itself and the integrity of the relationship is far more important. These values include love, respect, unselfishness, trust, exclusivity, continuity, being accommodating and being responsible (Le Roux 2010:2).

2.16 Why do Christians associate sex with sin?

Augustine (354-430nC) said that a woman isn't the image of God, and the sooner a married couple detach themselves from sexual intercourse the better (Friesen 1990:175). Tertullianus was against sex in a marriage and wondered why God ever let it happened in the first place (Friesen 1990:18). Origenes (185-254nC) castrated

himself at a young age to get rid of sexual desires (Deschner 1080:252). Many of his followers did the same (Hunt 1959:103). In the two decades after Christ, the Church got so caught up with the evilness of woman and sexual desires that sex and sin almost became synonyms (Hunt 1959:145).

By the time of the seventh century Pope Gregorius declared that a couple is impure if they should gain any pleasure from sex. The sin of pleasure was twice as big as the sex deed itself (Friesen 1990:175).

Augustine had a dualistic view of humans in which body and soul were divided. The physical was inferior to the spiritual, creating a negative connotation to sexuality. He saw sexuality as something evil which ultimately ends up in sinning. Sex within the marital bond and with the intension of procreation was the only legitimate reason for this action. Not even in this way was sex without sin, since the initial sin was transferred to the child, who was born in sin. From this perspective people had to strive to control sexual desires and ultimately overcome the physical needs of the body. For Augustine sexual desire became the archetypal sin. Augustine sexualized sin and started a long history of degrading sexuality to something shameful. This caused sexuality to be understood in a negative way, something that is dangerous, sinful and associated with women (Haspel 2007:264).

New Testament research of the past decade confirmed that Augustine's anthropological views cannot be Biblically supported. Although Paul also uses dualistic language when he makes a distinction between body and soul, he understands the human body as holistic. Sexuality per se isn't seen as good or evil, it is about the way it is dealt with. Sexuality is a gift from God and part of His creation, but also runs the risk, as the rest of creation, to be spoiled by sin. Therefore sexuality is also subject to the most important ethical guideline: "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Gal. 5:14) (Haspel 2007:265).

The negative connotation to sexuality cannot be linked to Jesus' life and teachings. On the contrary, Jesus had an open, free relationship with women and invited all people to celebrate life. His unconditional love and acceptance of all people is the essence of the way He lived. The church's bias is sadly the opposite of that what

Jesus taught and the way Jesus lived (Van Niekerk 2007:327). By saying God became human in Jesus Christ, life is declared holy. In a mysterious way God is also born in us. The experience of God in our lives cannot be reduced by shutting out the physical aspects of our being. Erotic love is symbolic of Godly love. We experience God with our senses (Van Niekerk 2007:315). Dominian (2001) is of the opinion that sexual intercourse should not only be seen as a gift from God, but should also take place in God's presence.

However, guilt and shame are still used today to declare sex wrong and sinful. So many children grow up hearing that sex is wrong, shameful and a source of evil. This could lead to many years of unanswered questions about sexuality and dealing with it. Wouldn't it be better to educate young people about sex, advise them, warn them against the dangers and teach them guidelines that are Biblically grounded? Sexuality is part of the whole person, body and soul and it is a beautiful part.

I agree with McClintock (2001:56-57) when she says:

We can teach our children about sexuality and biblical moral standard by emphasizing love, commitment, and consequence. We don't need to shame them in order to teach them. We can teach them to value good communications in sex by the way we ourselves communicate with them about sex... Being responsible about one's sexuality involves self-awareness, the freedom to say no, and the obligations that go along with saying yes.

2.17 Sex in context

Sex should be understood and judged in a certain context. Not only is sex a biological-psychological phenomenon that is unchanged since Biblical times, but sex is also a cultural-social phenomenon (Müller 2007:375).

1+1 equalled 2 in the first century and still equals 2 in the twentieth century; in the same way sex was and is a biological-psychological phenomenon then and now. But on the other hand it is not quite the same now as it was then. Although the formula of

1+1=2 always stays valid, the meaning that it has in a certain context doesn't always stay the same. The meaning that this formula had for people in the pre-modern era is certainly not the same for people in a digital post-modern era. The same goes for sex (Müller 2007:375).

Sex is more than a biological or psychological phenomenon. It is also a social-cultural phenomenon and the meaning and values that it has depends on the society within a certain culture. Ancient people's experience of sex was surely influenced by the social customs of their time (Müller 2007:376). Modern society is unfamiliar with many of the customs of Biblical times and certainly do not practise them today. Examples of this is a levirate marriage where the brother of a deceased man is obligated to marry his brother's widow, Erebu marriage where the husband lived with his wife in her father's domain, prostitution as well as polygamy were also very common. Population growth was very important to the Israelites, who were the minority group. Therefore semen, that already contains life according to them, was not supposed to be wasted. Texts about masturbation and homosexuality should be understood in this light (Müller 2007:376).

Today society is concerned about overpopulation. With the knowledge about semen and conceiving processes, texts about sexuality and marriage cannot be interpreted in the same way and proclaimed to be the core of our moral system (Müller, 2007:376). On the other hand there are aspects of modern society that didn't exist in Biblical times. There wasn't something like adolescence for instance. It is understood that Maria was about 14 years old when she had Jesus. And that was the general custom. There was a much quicker transition from being a child to adulthood. This means that people got married by the time they became aware of their sexuality and when their energy levels were optimal. This is very different from today where the average age to get married is late twenties or early thirties. The pleasure aspect of sex is also more important today than the procreation function (Müller 2007:377).

A contextual interpretation of the Bible does not imply a move away from the clear evangelical norms of Jesus Christ. An evangelical instead of a legalistic approach does not mean that there are no norms or values when it comes to sexuality. With an evangelical approach the emphasis is on morals rather than on rules. For instance;

the *rule* would be – no sex before marriage, the *moral* would be - a sexual relationship is meant for a steady, long-lasting relationship where two people love each other and celebrate that love by being intimate. In this relationship the partners accept responsibility for each other within a love covenant (Müller 2007:378).

A value- or norm-based approach could never work with rigid rules, because the emphasis is on personal freedom and responsibility. The legalistic approach leads to rule upon rule which leads to conviction. This method, followed by the Pharisees and teachers of law, attempts to control and condemn people. With the evangelical approach couples accept responsibility for each other (Müller, 2007:378). According to the documents of the Reformed Church in Netherlands, *In Liefde Trouw zijn* - distinction should be drawn between contextual norms, which are formulated in each period in time, and the basic values that are found in the Bible. It is thus necessary to consider Biblical teaching about marriage and sex and re-evaluate that in today's context.

Müller (2007) identifies four fundamental principles necessary in a relationship in order to overrule the line theory. The most important values are mutual reciprocity, freedom and security between two people and a relationship that is long-lasting. If these values are present in a relationship the question about what side of the line sex occurs on is irrelevant, what is more important is the nature of the sexual relationship (Müller 2007:379).

Values like these are based on the Great commandment, to love God and to love your neighbour; with these in mind, casual, superficial, experimental sex could never be justified. If one is fanatic about the Law, one could pick up and throw the first stone. But who is without sin, and what makes sex a bigger sin in many minds than any other sin? (Müller 2007:379).

All four values are interlinked; a long-lasting sexual relationship with elements of aggression or violence is not safe, and the people involved do not feel secure and free, therefore such a relationship would be destructive. If the line theory were to be strictly applied, one would be tempted to argue that the couple in such a relationship should stay together because “No human being must separate, then, what God has

joined together” (Matt. 19:6)., If this is the case we allow abuse to rule over love, which goes against the overarching message of the Bible. Jesus shows us that our devotion to the Law shouldn’t compromise neighbourly love; the Pharisees believed that you were not to prepare food or heal a human being on the Sabbath because the Law forbids you to work on a Sabbath. Jesus’ response to this was “It is kindness that I want, not animal sacrifices” (Matt. 12:7) (Müller 2007:379).

Nevertheless, one cannot argue that mutual reciprocity, freedom, and security are enough to justify a sexual relationship, a long-term commitment should be part of a sexual relationship, if not it is abused. It should be remembered that the people involved in a relationship are always more important than the institution. However, the protection of the institution of marriage promotes a healthy society, which is in the best interest of the individuals in the society (Müller 2007:380).

CHAPTER 3 MARRIAGE

3.1. The meaning of marriage

According to Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (2003) marriage is the sacred, covenantal union of one man and one woman formed when they swear before God an oath of lifelong loyalty and love to one another. The sign and seal of marriage is sexual intercourse.

“Marriage as understood in the Christian world means lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, such as being preceded by some form of ceremonial, recognized by the law of the particular country in which it takes place” (Benton 1970:85).

“The marriage relationship is an ‘eminently human love’, a love that brings together ‘the human and the divine’. Partners in marriage are capable of being mediators and recipients of the relational love of God which led to the world being restored through Christ” (Thatcher 1999:9).

Modern society’s opinion on marriage covers a wide range of the ever changing spectrum. Matthew’s summary of the essence of marriage, as designed by the Creator, best explains the intent of this male-female relationship: “So they are no longer two, but one. No human being must separate then what God has joined together” (Matt. 19:6)

3.2. The importance of marriage

3.2.1 Social importance

- In general

According to anthropologists, there is no society wherein marriage does not exist in some format (Montague 1959:240). The institution is, therefore, a universal phenomenon. The importance of marriage is confirmed by literature, laws and a long history of practice (Calitz 1991:1; Bartkowski 2001:3-4; De Waal, 1992:1).

In communities all over the world men and women live together in some form of marriage (Coertze 1977:153). The history of marriage shows that this institution is of high importance in Europe, United States of America, Africa, Asia and the Far East (Benton 1970:926; Browning 2003:1-3).

The fact that the topic of marriage is a hot discussion point at international conferences alludes to its importance and actuality (Browning 2003:2; Sono 1994:1; Guerra 2002:81-103).

Fidelity in stable marriage relationships is crucial to fidelity in society. Personal sexual practices affect the general well-being of society. Promiscuity and infidelity weaken social stability and well-being. Marriage forms the foundation of interpersonal communities in most societies. As a result, marriage and family life play a big role in the attitudes and patterns of relationships in the larger society. Fidelity between spouses plays a big role in the rearing of children. Children learn primary attitudes about fidelity and relationships from their parents, specifically from the way the parents treat each other. Marital fidelity is crucial for healthy child development. This will ensure that the future adult members of society adopt attitudes that will secure their well-being and ultimately the well-being of society (Grenz 1990:115-116).

- South Africa

Marriage and the birth of a child play a big role in Africa. He who refuses to get married “is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a lawbreaker, he is not only abnormal but sub-human” (Gehman 1989:53). “Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return” (Mbiti 1969:133).

The fact that 75% of white people in South Africa older than 21 years were married in 1980, confirms the importance of marriage (Raubenheimer 1987:49).

3.2.2 Religious importance

Marriage is equally important in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Matthew 19:6 states that no one should separate what God has joined together and Malachi 2:16 says God hates divorce. About the importance of marriage Augustine said “The first natural union of human society is the husband and wife” (Hunter 1992:1).

The Old Testament portrays God as the prime founder of a marriage partnership (Molapo 2004:96). The fact that the Bible considers marriage to be important can't be denied. One of the Ten Commandments – “Do not commit adultery.” (Ex. 20:14) aims to protect marriage by all means.

- Marriage as a metaphor

The Bible portrays the marriage bond as a metaphor of the spiritual relationship between God and His people or Christ and His Church.

- *Old Testament*

In the Old Testament the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is associated with marriage. Yahweh's intention was that Israel would be like a virgin who gives herself exclusively to her husband (Jer. 2:2) and thereby becomes his delight (Isa. 62:5) (Grenz 1990:61).

A cycle of Israel's betrayal and adultery and Yahweh's forgiveness and faithfulness continues throughout the Old Testament. Israel abandoned Yahweh a few times for other gods.

When Josiah was king, the Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, “Have you seen what Israel, that unfaithful woman, has done? She has turned away from Me, and on every high hill and under every green tree she has acted like a prostitute. I thought that after she had done all this, she would surely return to Me. But she did not return, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it all” (Jer. 3:6-8).

Despite the adultery of Israel, Yahweh was always faithful. There is hope, in Hosea's words, that God will renew their relationship someday in the future. “I will show love to those who were called “unloved,” and to those who were called “not-My-people” I

will say, “you are my people,” and they will answer, “You are my God”” (Hosea 2:23) (Grenz 1990:62).

The Old Testament’s primary focal point is human community – of which the foundation is the male and female in marriage. The primary focal point in the New Testament is the church as the body of Christ. Christ’s relationship to the church gives the male-female bond a special status as a metaphor of the gospel (Grenz 1990:63).

- *New Testament*

In the New Testament marriage is used as a metaphor for Christ and the church. Paul tells us about the bond between husband and wife as a metaphor of the bond between Christ and His people in Ephesians 5. He teaches of the deeper spiritual reality of marriage. Christ’s love for His church becomes the model for a husband’s care for his wife. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. A parallel between Paul’s text and the Old Testament is noted.

We see this metaphor in several places in the New Testament. In Ephesians 5 and in numerous places in the Gospels Jesus is referred to as the bridegroom and the church as His bride. Revelations also refers to marriage between Jesus and the church, “For the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself for it” (Rev. 19:7). A male and female that enter into the matrimonial bond and maintain that bond in all fidelity is the symbol of the fellowship of the eschatological redeemed humanity with the Creator (Grenz 1990:65).

Paul does however seem negative about marriage. In 1 Corinthians 7:7 Paul suggests that everyone should be unmarried as he was, and that would be better to remain unmarried. However, Luther reads verse 7 differently. It is his understanding that everyone received a particular gift from God – a few received the gift of abstinence and the majority received the gift of marriage. “Marriage is therefore the most religious state of all because only this – and not celibacy – leads to a real inner spiritual life” (Buitendag 2007:445).

3.2.3 Importance of legislation

The actuality of marriage is confirmed by worldwide legislation on this topic. The stable, continued existence of a nation depends greatly on marriage and family life. Legislation is necessary to regulate marriage, as marriage is clearly important for a healthy society. The institution of marriage was established by the state as an attempt to regulate society, and because the church was under the authority of the state, the church became a useful tool (Beeld, 2009/12/08).

A relevant question is whether the wedding ceremony is a matter of state or church? Both the state and the church share an interest in the institution of marriage. The marriage bond is both a social and a legal contract and a spiritual union. The state is involved in the marriage bond in terms of its status as a civil, legal contract. The church is involved in the marriage because of its status as a spiritual metaphor (Grenz 1990:76-77).

3.3 Purpose of marriage

The purpose of marriage is primarily mutual support and guidance, physical and spiritual fulfilment, and the prevention of immorality. "Marriage is necessary as remedy for lust, and through marriage God permits sexual intercourse. Similar is the allegory which Paul employs: that Adam and Eve, or marriage itself, is a type of Christ and the church" (Buitendag 2007:445).

3.3.1 God's Glory

Man's most important objective as the image of God is to glorify God and enjoy his relationship with Him (Ps.73:28; Cor. 10:31). Paul explains in Ephesians 5:21-33 that the marriage relationship is to be copied after that of Christ and the church. A husband and wife should in their relationship display the nature of Christ's relationship with His church, Christ as the divine Husband and the church as His bride (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

This same principle is also seen in the Old Testament, where the marriage relationship was one of the comparisons used to describe Yahweh's relationship with Israel (Jer. 2:1; 3:6; 31:32; Hos. 1-3). (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

3.3.2 Companionship

Adam needed “a helper who is like him,” someone to complement and complete him. Together under God’s direction, they could find satisfaction in fulfilling the purpose for which God had created them. The companionship in marriage promotes physical, psychological, mental, emotional, and spiritual health (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

Western society formed an understanding of the meaning of marriage, namely companionship. In the ideal marriage husband and wife become closest friends. The truly happily married couples are those who experience intimacy, who enjoy being together, and who share in the interests, goals and dreams of their partners or spouses. We find companionship in the Bible as well. In Genesis 2 God created a woman for Adam as a suitable companion. The narrator gives us a sense of the intense companionship between spouses like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca and Jacob and Rachel. The tender love story of Ruth and Boaz sketches the intimacy and companionship that they shared. In the New Testament Peter’s wife accompanied him on his missionary journeys (1 Cor 9:5) (Grenz 1990:69).

3.3.3 Procreation and child rearing

Marriage is important for producing and rearing godly children (Gen. 1:28; Ps.127). From the moment of conceiving, children are a blessing from God. They are a source of joy in a marriage (Prov. 17:6). Parents are responsible for the moral and spiritual education of their children (Eph. 6:4). They should lead their children by a consistent godly lifestyle and loving discipline so that children can learn to make choices based on biblical truths (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

A stable marriage is important for the development of children. Children mature best when good role models of both genders are present in the home. Ancient Hebrews emphasized the importance of having and raising children (Ps. 127:3, Deut. 6:6-9 and Eph. 6:1-2). Although of high importance, procreation can’t be the only reason for marriage (Grenz 1990:68).

3.3.4 Sexual intimacy

God's intention with sex is that it occurs exclusively within the monogamous relationship of marriage and acts as reminder that they are "one flesh," bound together by the marriage covenant. Sexual intimacy was part of God's good creation (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24-25). Intercourse is part of the natural expression of love within a marriage and provides emotional intimacy, deepens the couple's friendship, and helps to develop a servant attitude within the oneness of marriage (Prov. 5:15-19; 1 Cor. 7:2-5). Sexual intimacy should be a time of joy and mutual satisfaction for both husband and wife (Songs of Songs 6-7) (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

The proper context for the sex act is marriage, and it forms the boundary within which the sex drive should be exercised. Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 7 when he writes to the Corinthian believers to not become involved in loose moral practices. "But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband." (1 Cor. 7:2). He also advises the widows and unmarried: "Now, to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone as I do. But if you cannot restrain your desires, go ahead and marry - it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor.7:8-9) (Grenz 1990:66).

"...the social function of the social institution of matrimony can neither be sufficiently specified through the phenomenon of love, nor through the phenomenon of sexuality. Love and sexuality are necessary, yet by no means sufficient conditions for forming and maintaining a marriage".

(Körtner 2008:216)

3.4 The origin of marriage

The institution of marriage pre-dates reliable recorded history. Various cultures have had their own theories or legends on the origin of marriage.

“Some scholars are inclined to trace the origin of marriage to pairing arrangements of animals below man. Studies reveal that a more or less permanent association between one or more males and one or more females is common among birds and higher mammals”

(Locke & Peterson 1961: 311)

Many writers believe that the earliest form of marriage was a so-called group-marriage, implying a union between a certain group of men and a certain group of women. The first recorded evidence of marriage ceremonies uniting one woman and one man dates from about 2350 B.C., in Mesopotamia. Marriage had little to do with love or with religion. Over the next several hundred years, the way in which a marriage was conducted and its rules and implications have changed, as have the institution itself, depending on the culture and time period (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage>).

3.4.1 Pre-modern times

The institution of marriage in the Bible reflects a long history of sociological and cultural development, some stages of which there can be no absolute certainty (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible 1962).

Theological and social-cultural aspects of marriage have been related since biblical times. The formal aspects of marriage were of a cultural nature. Marriage was a social and cultural event in Israel, arranged, coordinated and celebrated by the two families. Hosea, Jeremiah (Jer. 2:2) and Ezekiel (Ez. 16) describe marriage as a covenant modelled after the God-people covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Noticeably women are always compared to Israel, who is the unfaithful party. This covenant is echoed in the New Testament where marriage is compared to the relationship between Christ and the church (Van Wyk 2002:268).

It was only from 5 A.D. (in Latin, anno domini which means after Christ) that the church began to play a significant part in the marriage, with cultural customs on the one side but with a strong theological connotation on the other side (Van Wyk 2002:269).

3.4.2 Modern times

In contrast to pre-modern times the focus starts to shift from the family and community to the individual and his or her rights, which were previously inferior to the family and community. Marriages are no longer arranged by the family. Love, friendship and attraction became more important in choice of a partner.

The church searched for Biblical norms to set the rules for marriages. Among these 'rules' it was believed that the man is the head of the house and that a wife should be obedient. This era led to women being mistreated and oppressed (Van Wyk 2002:273).

3.4.3 Post-modern time

In the post-modern era an appreciation for sexuality re-emerged. The mystery and powerful energy of the love between a man and a woman that culminates in the sex act is acknowledged and embraced.

The problem with the post-modern outlook is relativism, which sparks the notion that there is no such thing as sin anymore. People could decide what is wrong or right according to their own standards and live accordingly. The church cannot support this view, because the Bible should always be the norm for marriage and sexuality (Van Wyk 2002:279).

3.5 The nature of marriage

The book Genesis illustrates how God ordered man and woman to bond in companionship, and become one flesh, complementing one another (Molapo, 2004:92). The first marriage was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden. God gave Eve to Adam as a wife (Gen 2:18-25). The unique unity between Adam and Eve was seen in that the two became "one flesh." This relationship is like no other. The oneness of marriage separates a couple from others as a distinct family unit (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003). "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one" (Gen 2:24). The divine instruction

is also seen in Matthew 19:4-6: “And God said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one’” (Vers. 5).

The conjugal relationship manifests the covenant that God made with mankind to be co-creators of the human species. The bearing of children deepens the meaning of marriage, and incurs responsibilities on the part of the married couple (Molapo 2004:93).

Because God instituted marriage, it is more than just a ceremony. Biblical passages testify that the marriage relationship is based on a covenant or oath sworn before God: Prov.2:17; Ezek. 16:8, 59-62; Hos. 2:16-20; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:6.

3.6 Biblical marriage versus modern marriage

Referring to a “Biblical marriage” can be misleading, as we find several different types of marriages in the Bible. The Church’s understanding of marriage is different from the understanding of marriage in the Bible. Yet the Church claims its understanding of marriage can be traced back to the Bible (Van Eck 2007:82). The heterosexual marriage of the twenty-first century could not nearly be classified as ‘Biblical’. As a matter of fact a ‘Biblical marriage’ does not exist because there are more than one marriage model found in the Bible – polygamy was in fact still in the kings period considered as the acceptable norm (Le Roux 2010:5).

The post-modern understanding of marriage is an intimate loving relationship between two people. Marriage is known for companionship, sharing experiences and mutual trust. Words describing marriage today would include give, receive, share, supplement, support and continues communication. Two individuals become one, where both partners make adjustments to complement each other. This is possible because both partners are equal; the roles of men and women in Bible times have been redefined (Van Eck 2007:82). Choosing a life partner is personal, although norms and values often play a big role. Sexual intimacy in the post-modern world includes pleasure, relaxation, creativity and orgasm. Expressing sexuality in this way results in an exclusive haven that only two people can share (Van Eck 2007:82).

In order to understand the difference between marriage in the Bible and marriage today, the following areas will be discussed: meaning of marriage, marriage as a process, including engagement, adultery, divorce, and remarrying. The purpose of these descriptions is to illustrate the essential differences between marriage in the Bible and marriage today (Van Eck 2007:103).

With regard to marriage, the Bible should be read with an understanding of the different cultural contexts in order to avoid making the mistake of trying to trace today's marriage institution back exactly to what it was in New Testament times. To do this is to confuse culture and gospel, and to accept Biblical culture as the canon of today. The question is in terms of the difference between marriage in the Bible and marriage today – does the Bible have anything to say regarding marriage as a post-modern institution?

3.7 Marriage in the first-century Mediterranean world

Marriage in the Mediterranean world of the first-century was all about family and not about the individual choice and union of two people.

“Marriages in antiquity were made by extended families, not individuals, and were parentally arranged; they were not agreements between a man and a woman who have been romantically involved Individuals really did not get married. Families did. One family offered a male, the other a female. Their wedding stood for the wedding of the larger extended families and symbolized the fusion of honour of both families involved. It could be undertaken with a view to political and/or economical concerns – even when it may be confined to fellow ethnics, as it was in first-century Israel.”

(Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:28, 240)

Arranged marriages seem unthinkable in modern society. In the first century marriage was a family affair, with women forming part of the honour of men.

Individuals “did not exist” – arranged marriages were the logical option. The main purpose of marriage was procreation (Van Eck 2007:105).

“Living together constituted marriage in all societies, and the procreation of children was its explicit object. Marriages were registered to make children legitimate.” (Ferguson 1987:55)

3.7.1 Entering matrimony as a process

Since marriage was the union between two families, it was a very important event in the lives of both families. Entering matrimony included a certain process where the woman was released from her biological family to become part of her new family. Commencing with choosing a partner, the process progressed to a ceremony for the engagement, followed by the marriage ceremony, and concluded when the woman moved into the house of her new husband (Van Eck 2007:106).

3.7.2 Negotiating: Choosing a spouse

In most cases negotiations took place between families with equal status and honour. The mother was usually in charge of the negotiations and the father was responsible for finalizing the agreement between the two families. Certain qualities were important when looking for a husband for a daughter: he had to be someone who would be a good provider, a good father and an honourable citizen - in other words, someone who is honourable in the eyes of society. Note that the criteria did not include a loving and caring husband (Van Eck 2007:107).

Criteria for the ideal wife for a man were much stricter, since the future wife had to become part of the new family and had to fit into the established kinship group. The more influential and wealthy a girl’s family, the better choice for a wife she would be. A woman should have certain qualities from which the husband would benefit; she had to be a hard worker, good mother for their children, be able to do needlework and be sure not to bring shame over her husband. Since the main purpose of marriage was procreation, the wife had to be able to bear children. It was also important that she was a virgin (Van Eck 2007:108-109).

The Torah had very specific prescriptions for who was allowed to marry who. The cultural purity rituals included a list that categorized people according to their level of purity, in order to determine who was allowed to marry who (Van Eck 2007:108).

3.7.3 Engagement (Betrothal)

After the decision was made by the parents on who their daughter or son was going to marry, they proceeded to the engagement (betrothal). The Biblical term betrothal is an act of engagement, to some extent synonymous with marriage and as binding as marriage itself (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

The engagement was a process, starting with the father of the groom presenting a present or gesture to the father of the bride as an offer for the bride. The bride's father responded by offering a gift to the groom's father. If the negotiations were successful the fathers of the two families would draw up a contract, which had to be signed in the presence of the whole community. The agreement was now legal and binding and the bride and groom were now officially betrothed. This meant that the man and woman were now 'off the market' and that the girl was now part of the man's honour. They did not yet live together but the girl was considered to be the man's property. Sexual contact between a strange man and the engaged bride was considered adultery, since it was seen as a challenge of the future groom's honour (Van Eck 2007:109-111).

3.7.4 The marriage ceremony

The third step in the marriage process was the wedding proper. Quite some time could pass from the betrothal to the wedding ceremony. Daughters were usually betrothed just before puberty, around twelve and a half years of age. Eighteen was seen as a good age for a man to get married (Van Eck 2007:111).

The wedding ceremony was an important event for both families. The groom's father had to present a ceremony that would not shame the bride's father and was a public display of the family's honour. The whole community was invited to the ceremony; if the food or wine was not enough it would mean a loss of honour for the groom's family. For a virgin bride the ceremony usually continued for seven days (starting on a Wednesday), if the family of the groom were able to afford it (Van Eck 2007:112).

The whole marriage process had a symbolic meaning. The wife moving out of her biological father's house into her husband's house is seen as a ritual status change. Through the marriage process the girl is released from her father's honour and established in the honour of her husband.

3.7.5 The position of women in marriage

Through marriage a woman became established in the honour of her husband and his family, therefore she had to be careful not to bring shame over her husband. She was now the property of her husband and his family. "Property' denotes something which is understood as an extension of the self, so that a violation of my property is a violation of my personhood" (Countryman 1988:147). The best status that a woman in Israel could have was to be married.

"A wife remained for most part on the periphery of her new husband's family. She would be perceived as a 'stranger', an outsider, by everyone in the house and would shed the stranger's role in some measure only when she became the mother of a son. The birth of a son assured her of security and status recognition in her husband's family. Moreover, a son would grow up to be his mother's ally and an advocate of her interests, not only against the father but against his own wife. In case of conflict in the household, daughters-in-law did not stand a chance. Thus the wife's most important relationship in the family is to her son."

(Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:241-242)

A new wife found her emotional support in her brothers and sisters, and the husband found his emotional support in his brothers and sisters and particularly in his mother (Van Eck, 2007:115-118).

3.7.6 Adultery

Adultery in the first-century Mediterranean world meant bringing shame over a married man by having sexual contact with his wife, that is, 'stealing' another man's position. A man could therefore only commit adultery against another married man – never against his own wife. Extramarital sexual contact of a wife was seen as

adultery against her husband. Sexual contact with a married woman by another man was regarded as a challenge of her husband's honour, and an expression of the 'offender's' masculinity. Sexual contact between a married man and a prostitute was not seen as adultery, neither was polygamy, since a man could not commit adultery against his wife (Van Eck 2007:118).

Sexual contact between a man and a not-engaged daughter of a father was also seen as adultery; since the daughter was established in her father's honour, the man affected the honour of the father.

The concept of adultery explained above is very different from our understanding today. Ethnocentric reading of texts should be avoided, where the concept of adultery in the first-century Mediterranean world and in the New Testament is transferred to modern day society (Van Eck 2007:119-120).

3.7.7 Divorce

If a man wished to divorce his wife he simply gave her a certificate of divorce. This letter meant that the woman was freed from her husband's honour; she would then move back to her family and was free to remarry. A man could give his wife a divorce letter but a wife could not divorce her husband (Van Eck 2007:120-121).

A man could have the following reasons for a divorce: adultery, even when he just suspected adultery or if she 'encouraged' adultery by leaving the house with loose hair, or revealing her shoulders, or having a conversation with another man. Infertility was also a reason for divorce, since procreation was valued so highly. If a couple were married for ten years without having children, it was expected of the husband to divorce his wife. Neglect of the husband's needs in terms of food and clothing could lead to divorce, while other common reasons for divorcing a wife were failure to warn her husband about her menstruation period, humiliating him in public, and cursing his parents (Van Eck 2007:122-123).

3.7.8 Remarriage

To remarry after a legal divorce was common in the first-century Mediterranean world and therefore we can assume it was acceptable. A divorced woman would usually try to remarry for different reasons; for one, she could now marry a man of

her own choice, secondly it would improve her financial position in terms of being cared for, and thirdly she would be socially in a much better position if she remarried. There was no stigma for a man to marry a divorced woman, except if she committed adultery against her previous husband (Van Eck 2007:123-124).

It is clear from the above description of marriage, adultery, divorce and remarriage in the first-century Mediterranean world that marriage customs differed vastly from modern-day marriage customs.

These differences have serious implications; the argument that a post-modern marriage should be Biblical, cannot be accepted. The implications of such an argument are the following: post-modern marriages should then be arranged by parents, the marriage would be patriarchal and polygamy would be acceptable. Sexual contact would be solely for the purpose of procreation. Men and women would have the minimum contact; they will have their own separate public spaces. Women would be owned by men. Men would not be able to commit adultery against their wives and women would not be able to divorce their husbands (Van Eck 2007:120-123).

It is thus important that Biblical texts concerning marriage, adultery and divorce be read in the context of the culture of the time. Care should be taken not to apply statements concerning marriage in the Bible directly to post-modern marriages.

“We often claim the canon to be the rule for faith and practice in the Christian community and yet we demonstrate by the way we read the Bible that our commitment to culture has been far more profound than we are willing to admit. Culture, not canon, has too often shaped the life of the Church.”

(Rohrbaugh 2006:574)

3.8 Song of Songs on marriage

The age old book Song of Songs has much to teach modern society about sexuality. Although it isn't mentioned once that the couple is married, why do we still assume

that they are? It could be that the writer is cautious (and therefore dishonest) to upset the conservative Afrikaans audience, who are not ready to hear about sex before marriage (Viviers 2006:92) In spite of the fact that there is no indication that the couple are married, they enjoy each other's bodies to the full.. This is odd, as one would have expected the Bible to be very strict, especially on sexuality and marriage.

According to Fox 1985 the two characters imagined themselves in fictional parts for instance being royal. In the same way they imagine themselves as "bride" and "groom". Therefore we can assume they did foresee a marriage somewhere in the future, although the only thing that matters at the moment is the passionate love they feel for each other. The author doesn't undermine or reject marriage of that time, but places it in perspective. True and faithful love is what is important; the milieu where it happens is secondary. And this includes a sexual relationship (Viviers 2006:101).

For generations people were not allowed to talk openly about sex, as though it were shameful. Yet we find this book in the Bible that sings about sexuality and explicitly talks about physical desire, passion and pleasure (Du Toit 2007:121-136). This false notion that sex is wrong and sinful, should be set right in order to restore sex as a beautiful gift from God. What message does it send out to adolescents if adults constantly avoid the subject? The questions raised by puberty are difficult enough to deal with, and acting as though sexuality is wrong and sinful does not make it easier. Nevertheless, this sensitive issue should be dealt with circumspectly.

Fox (1985:313-314) summarizes Song of Song's point of view spot on "With Canticles sexual intercourse does not consummate marriage. Rather, marriage will consummate sex...". The reason for resisting premarital sex could be traced back to the numerous immoral examples thereof, although marriage doesn't guarantee morality in the bedroom (Viviers 2006:101).

Although we don't know whether the couple in Song of Songs are married, the main theme of the book, that they belong to one another, sends out a strong message about the values that a relationship should have. The love they share could only exist between two people. The fact that they have saved their fruit for each other probably indicates that they have saved themselves for each other and that they

have not shared this kind of love with anyone else. The sex that they enjoy is only possible in a relationship where love, trust, care and commitment are present.

The relationship between the two characters is exclusive and committed; no third party is welcome in their intimate relationship. They are not bothered by status, wealth and power; things that usually destroy relationships. Their relationship is playful and interesting, they respect each other as equals and both are willing to make sacrifices. Isn't it ironic that Song of Songs characterizes the ideal marriage virtues, yet it is never mentioned that they are married (Viviers 2006:102). Faithful love is what it is about, not marriage or the name that is given to it. "The Song does assume a sexual ethic, but the sexual virtue cherished is not chastity. It is fidelity: unquestioned devotion to one's lover..." (Fox 1985:315)

3.9 Marriage – instituted by God or not?

A few problems come to mind when talking about marriage. For instance the notion that marriage is instituted by God; it is a fact that not only Christians but all people from different religious beliefs gets married, which were also the case centuries before the origin of Christian faith. Most people that are serious about their religion wants their marriage to be godly blessed. What makes a marriage official is in reality the legal side off the matter where as the ceremony and religious part differ from culture to culture (Le Roux 2010:4).

The church interpreted marriage for many years as "instituted" by God and a "blessing" from God, although the foundations of this perception cannot be traced in the Bible (van Wyk, 200:275). The creation narratives reveal that man and woman is in a special relationship with one another, but marriage as a specific institution cannot be derived from that. In the Hebrew Old Testament a proper word for marriage does not exist (Haspel 2007:265).

3.10 What constitutes marriage?

There have been continuous disagreements over what constitutes the sacrament of matrimony, whether it rests on consent, priestly blessing or sex. Who confers it (the

priest or the marrying couple); what exactly is conferred, and to whom is sacramental grace available? The traditional answer is that marriage is a sacrament for the baptized only (Thatcher 1999:41).

In Old Testament times a marriage tradition was established in which the groom or his family chose a suitable marriage partner, followed by a wedding ceremony that lasted a week or longer. The wedding night made the wedding official and sealed the contract between the two families (Grenz 1990:72).

Marriage was discouraged in the New Testament in the light of the imminent return of Christ. In the next century it was also discouraged because of negative attitudes toward sexuality and the preference of celibacy (Thatcher 1999:28).

In contemporary society a proposal is the beginning of a private commitment between the bride and the groom to be. This is a free and personal choice of both parties. The public ceremony follows and plays an important element in the forming of the marital bond.

The inward commitment between two people has to be expressed in the outward act. Many Christians look to agape as the essence of inward commitment. Agape is one of several Greek words translated into English as love. This love has been described as divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing and thoughtful. Agape is the special unconditional love of God, it is a selfless love, a love that was passionately committed to the well-being of others (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2003). Lewis (1960:118) saw agape as the highest level of love known to humanity, a love that brings forth caring, regardless of circumstance: he regarded it as a specifically Christian virtue.

Agape is the New Testament's ideal for all relationships, especially marriage. Inward commitment forms the basis of marriage. "So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead. Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions" (James 2:17-18). In the same way agape without outward expression is dead. The wedding vows and sexual intercourse forms

the most symbolic outward expressions of the inward marital commitment (Grenz 1990:74).

The Bible teaches that it is God who joins married partners together. Matthew 19:6 says “So they are no longer two, but one. No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together.” and Mark 10:9 says “what God has joined together, man must not separate”. But should it be understood that every couple formally joined together in the name of God is actually joined by God? The problem is that while God joins a man and a woman in matrimony, the godly act of joining them together is not identified with any actual human act, as the exchange of promises, love-making or priestly blessing. God’s blessing requires faith in God and rests on the word of God (Thatcher 1999:35).

3.11 Significance of the wedding ceremony

A wedding ceremony was never a requirement, until modern times. Only in the second millennium did marriage become a sacrament, and the meaning of ‘sacrament’ has completely changed since then (Thatcher 1999:28).

Since the 1960’s sexual revolution many people have questioned the wedding ceremony. Whether or not a couple should have a formal ceremony is debatable. Is that what brings about a marriage or is it their love and commitment to each other? ‘Why do we need a piece of paper?’ is a popular question. These are reasons why cohabitation has become more and more common.

A ceremony or a piece of paper can never be the most important aspect of marriage, but rather that inward commitment of the couple to each other and to the bond they share. But marriage is more than the personal bond. Throughout all time and all societies marriage has had a social and a public dimension. By publicly exchanging vows and signing a legal marriage certificate, society gives recognition to the married status of the new husband and wife. An outward public vow also solidifies a private inward commitment (Grenz 1990:74).

A public declaration of a lifelong commitment to each other offers the couple an event to remember. In difficult times, when there is temptation to walk out on the marriage, the partners should remind themselves of the vows they made in the presence of witnesses. The commitment of two people to each other is the ultimate human bond. Yet, the inward commitment remains incomplete and tentative without the outward expression by means of public declaration (Grenz 1990:75).

Prior to the Marriage Act that took effect in England and Wales in 1753, a religious ceremony and official registration was not legally required to endorse a marriage. In the eighteenth century marriage was enforced by law, which had more to do with the handing down of property than with the gospel. In modern times emphasis has shifted towards romantic love, own choosing of your partner and individual growth (Thatcher 1999:29).

3.12 Biblical models

Thatcher (1999) poses the following questions concerning marriage. What should we make of the variety of views on marriage, especially in the New Testament? Could these different views contribute to our contemporary understanding of marriage? Is the assumption that marriage is an unbreakable union, essential for the Christian marriage, or is it forced on people to sustain marriages that were already broken? Is marriage supposed to be a sacrament or not? How valid are theologies on marriage when they are mainly based on the experiences of men? Is a non-patriarchal marriage as institution a social possibility (Thatcher 1999:30)?

Christian marriages have different sexual ethics than the post-modern approach on marriage. According to Thatcher a Christian marriage has the following qualities: Regaining the traditional meaning of marriage, mutual self-sacrifice, children as a blessing from God, a God-people love grounded in the godly Trinity, a lifelong covenant with one person, and a post-patriarchal religious ethos. In contrast to this the post-modern approach to marriage is moving away from the traditional meaning of marriage. Personal identity comes first, children are often absent from these marriages, romantic love takes high priority, short term sexual relationships are

accepted, and they display a post-patriarchal, post-religious ethos (Thatcher 1999:64).

Thatcher identifies five models of marriage found in the Bible. The two primary models are “Marriage as a covenant” and “a One-flesh union” and the secondary models are “A dubious necessity”, “A worldly concession” and “Passionate mutual love”.

3.12.1 Marriage as a covenant

According to Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (2003) a covenant is an oath-bound promise whereby one person solemnly pledges to bless or serve another person in a specific way. Sometimes the keeping of the promise depends upon the meeting of certain conditions by the party to whom the promise is made.

An important characteristic of a covenant is the unequal relationship between the two parties. The relationship between God and Israel is a good example; God always stayed loyal to His promise while Israel often betrayed God.

To use a covenant model for marriage seems promising at first, because it is based on the relationship between God and His people. But such a relationship could be problematic because of its unequal nature. To transfer from the divine-human covenant-relationship between God and His people to the human covenant relationship of marriage has challenging consequences. Women are stereotyped and cast in the role of Israel, who is the inferior, unfaithful partner (Thatcher 1999:69).

Elements that could be valuable in the understanding of marriage as a covenant are the following: marriage is an agreement between two people, where both agree to the same stipulations; marriage is not a contract but a covenant, because God is the witness to this agreement; a Christian marriage is a bond between husband and wife that is affirmed in the presence of God; a Christian marriage is a covenant between two equal partners, between husband and wife who are equal recipients of the love of Christ; the marriage covenant is a model of the God-people covenant between Christ and the Church (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:643).

The covenant model highlights the very important Godly dimension of marriage. The inequality within the covenant marriage is not necessarily between husband and wife, but rather between the couple and God. The inequality is about being inferior to God, and not to each other. Equality in a marriage covenant must be emphasized, but it is only possible when God is superior in the relationship (Dreyer & Van Aarde, 2007a:644).

3.12.2 One-flesh union

This model can be traced back to Gen 2:23-24 “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.” ‘Becoming one’ should be understood as more than just becoming one through sexual intercourse. Ephesians 5:28 explains that a man should love his wife like his own body; by loving his wife, he loves himself. The two bodies that become one, do not only belong to each other but the two persons also become each other. Self-love has a new meaning in a Christian marriage; the self can only be complete in relation to the other (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:636).

The “one flesh” model is essential in marriage because of its image as a lifelong partnership that is acknowledged by Christ Himself. If the interpretation of Ephesians is used to understand the Genesis text, the becoming “one-flesh” could have the following meaning: “... a lifelong union where each partner loves the other as the partner loves him or herself ...” (Thatcher 1999:97). Marriage partners become “one” when they give themselves completely to the other as well as receiving the other just like Christ did. This model would give today’s marriages deeper meaning. Two individuals become part of one identity; this union is a union in Christ who gave Himself completely. This means that the two individuals in a Christian marriage would also be willing to make this sacrifice to love each other and be submissive similar to Christ. That is the “secret” of marriage (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:645).

Becoming one has different facets. It starts with the emotional intimacy between a man and a woman who have sufficient trust to share their deepest emotions. This honesty and trust lead to spiritual growth towards each other. The intimacy on a spiritual level creates the desire for physical intimacy. Becoming one sexually is the ultimate for two people that share an emotional intimate relationship. Sexual intimacy

is considered to be the deepest, most intimate form of communication (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:646).

3.12.3 A dubious necessity

In the Hebrew wisdom literature we find another model for marriage, one that alternate between appreciation for and scepticism about marriage. From this point of view women are stereotyped as the object of passion, admiration, nurturing and thankfulness, but also suspicion and hatred. “Husbands are warned repeatedly against the other woman’s allure. No wife is ever warned about a husband’s fragile fidelity” (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:644). Thatcher explains this complex view on women this way; “... a marriage is a source of blessing for the husband, it is also a source of grief for him. While a wife is a necessity, she is a dubious one” (Thatcher 1999:82).

3.12.4 A worldly concession

Paul gives a general negative outlook on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Marriage is allowed or granted only to avoid immoral behaviour like sexual intercourse outside marriage. In his view it is better to stay unmarried, since marriage is worldly and it distracts man from the Lord’s work. Marriage is therefore allowed, but not recommended. Paul seems to be mainly against desire, because desire together with sex leads to sin. Although sexual intercourse could sometimes be necessary, it should be without passion and pleasure. This was the view on marriage for more than a millennium (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:638).

The problem with this model is that it created the perception that marriage is the “licence” to be sexually active. It should be acknowledged that I don’t only *have* a body, but I also *am* a body. Sex within the marriage bond and marriage as institution is not only a concession for people who aren’t able to control their sexual needs, but something that you are, because it is only possible to live through one’s body before God (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:647).

3.12.5 Passionate mutual love

The book Song of Songs is an example of this model. This book is one of the few that reverse the traditional roles of a man and a woman. This was rather controversial in a patriarchal society where equality between men and women were

unthinkable. Whilst a woman would normally, according to her nature, be passive, she often takes the lead and the man who is supposed to be in control all the time, often loses control. Song of Songs' controversial openness toward erotic love could also contribute to today's view on marriage. It is striking how spontaneously and openly the lovers enjoy each other's nakedness. It is important to appreciate erotic love as a gift from God. Yet, even in modern society many people, especially Christians, think of sex as a forbidden subject and are often ashamed of their bodies and their sexuality. Sexuality and spirituality are very far from each other. Erotic love is then experienced without any connection to the love of God for all things (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007a:640,647-648).

A few essential issues are captured in this model. "Song of Songs-love" suggests equality between men and women. Erotic love together with sexual intercourse is valued positively without a promiscuous label or procreation as requirement. It is expected that the couple are devoted to each other and that they treat one another with respect. Although passionate mutual love isn't restricted to marriage, marriage should be the ultimate goal for the couple to enjoy each other in the light of God's love. In modern culture where sexuality is commercialized and made superficial, this approach could contribute to people rediscovering the deeper meaning of sexuality (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:677).

Could these models assist in understanding the essence of marriage in post-modern times? Consideration of Adrian Thatcher's models as a possible framework and guidelines to address the complexity of marriage in modern context, should take cognisance of the following points:

Reasons for cohabitation and sex before marriage: it is often a reaction to the failure of traditional patterns; birth control technology makes living together before marriage 'safe'; living together to avoid promiscuity but saving on big expenses like a wedding or possible divorce; peer pressure, saving on expenses in terms of housing or obtaining a qualification are also common reasons (Thatcher 1999:104).

Different types of cohabitation include: informal cohabitation, which happens without planning ahead; living together as preparation for marriage; living together as a trial

before marriage, to test the waters; and living together instead of marriage. Cohabitation is less frowned upon and has become part of modern society. The New Testament is silent on cohabitation or sex before marriage, while the Old Testament mainly talks about purity laws rather than sex before marriage (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:655).

Churches are generally negative about cohabitation because Christians grew up with certain preconceptions about marriage. Sexual intercourse is intended exclusively for marriage (after the ceremony) and any sexual activities outside marriage are wrong. That is why living together is seen as sin and a decay of discipline. Yet it becomes clear in everyday life that marriage doesn't guarantee morality in the bedroom (Dreyer & van Aarde 2007b:656).

Thatcher makes it clear that, apart from the modern view that marriage starts with the wedding ceremony, there was also a more traditional view that the commencement of marriage happens in phases. In pre-modern times marriages were concluded in different ways, namely consent of the responsible parties from both sides, sexual intercourse and even pregnancy. After the couple was promised to each other, sex was permitted (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:656).

In the light of this background Thatcher comes to some conclusions: There are no formal instructions for the steps to marriage. Therefore couples who are not married but are living together, should be seen as returning to the earlier more informal practice. This is not rejecting the Christian marriage, but rather the shape that marriage started taking on in the Victorian area. Secondly, the big changes that the Christian marriage had to accommodate in the modern era should be noted. Therefore changes in the twenty-first-century are also necessary. The Christian marriage, as seen in its developing history, is an adaptable institution. In the third place, Thatcher explains that purity before marriage does not necessarily mean that persons who are going to get married are not allowed to have sex before the marriage, but that they had a relationship of mutual faithfulness. The importance of "moral sex" inside a relationship, with characteristics such as love, devotion, fidelity and mutual respect, cannot be stressed enough (Thatcher 1999 in Dreyer & Van Aarde [2007b]:658).

Finally, according to Thatcher, the traditional theory, where the couple was promised to each other before the wedding ceremony, could be used in post-modern context. The Roman-Catholic Church believes that marriage is valid, when both parties agreed to it. According to Dreyer & Van Aarde [2007b]:658 Bishop John Spong suggests that betrothal is the answer to cohabiting. Betrothal is a “relationship that is faithful, committed, and public but not legal or necessarily for a lifetime” (Spong 1988:177 in Dreyer & Van Aarde [2007b]:658).

Taking the opinions discussed above into consideration, it is clear that all sexual activity before marriage isn't always wrong. It should also be noted that marriage was always a changing institution throughout its history. Cohabiting, with certain stipulations, shouldn't be seen as a threat to the institution of marriage and the family. A possible solution is that engagement or betrothal could be seen as a step toward marriage similar to pre-modern times (Dreyer & Van Aarde [2007b]:660).

If this is the case, all sexual intercourse before the wedding ceremony should not be seen as 'sex before marriage; if the phases of marriage are taken into consideration, the couple would have started with phase one of the marriage. Thatcher however does not recommend sex before the wedding ceremony, he rather considers it as a concession, similar to Paul not recommending but allowing marriage (Thatcher 1999 in Dreyer & Van Aarde [2007b]:665).

CHAPTER 4 DEVELOPMENT OF MARRIAGE AS A CONCEPT IN THE BIBLE

4.1 Marriage in the first-century Mediterranean world

Marriage in the New Testament is a continuation of marriage as understood in the Jewish period of the Old Testament. To correctly distinguish these periods the term “marriage in the first-century Mediterranean world” is used.

To understand the institution of marriage in the Biblical world the cultural background has to be considered. Four aspects of the cultural world of the Bible are relevant: marriage formed part of the social institution of the family, women were always established in the patriarchal family, personality is understood dyadic, and different marriage strategies can be discerned throughout Biblical times (Van Eck 2007a:82).

4.1.1 Marriage as part of the family institution

Four types of social practices can be distinguished in the community, namely: kinship, which entails the social structure that people belonged to and were devoted to; economic customs, to provide for the family in terms of trading goods and services, political practices, which had collective control in certain communities by means of power, and religious practices, which refer to an inclusive system that is recognized by influences (Malina 1986:152).

In the first-century Mediterranean world a woman always formed part of the patriarchal family, an unmarried woman (daughter) belonged to her father, and a married woman was established in the honour of her husband. Thus the wife was a symbol of shame for her husband’s family and had to be sensitive not to bring shame over him (Van Eck 2007a:85).

4.1.2 Honour and shame

Honour and shame was a fundamental value of the Mediterranean society of the first century, and one of the most important influences in Jewish culture in the Old Testament (Satlow 2001:101). Jewish marriage customs are better understood against the background of this culture. Honour can be defined as a person or group’s

need of value, respect and status that is publicly acknowledged. Shame, the opposite of honour, is humiliation, embarrassment, disgrace, or to bring shame on one self or the family. It was a serious matter when an individual or group failed to maintain their honour. In the Old Testament women were seen as a great source of honour (Matthews & Benjamin 1993:132). An unmarried woman's sexuality belonged to her father and a married woman's to her husband. The man had exclusive rights to the woman's sexuality (Marsman 2003:121).

Proof of a girl's virginity with the wedding was an important measure of a family's honour or shame. It was especially the father's responsibility to guard over his daughter's virginity. A family's honour depended on the daughter's virginity. Being a virgin was the gateway to marriage, which was the only way to have a house and children (Matthews & Benjamin 1993:178).

A wife who wasn't able to have children brought shame over herself, her father and her husband. Gen 16 and 30 speak about women who used their slaves to have children for them to avoid the shame of being barren. In that way they maintained their family's honour. Although the Old Testament portrays a man's world, the family's honour or shame depended greatly on the women in the family (Deut 22).

It is important in the study of marriage in the first-century Mediterranean world to understand the concept of honour and shame, as it defines the two genders and their duties and place in society. While a man had honour, a female ought to have had shame. This shame referred to a woman's sensitivity to what others think of her. Shame was a positive value in a woman. In males shame was a negative experience, being shamed a man lost his honour. (Van Eck 2007a:88).

“Honor might be described as socially proper attitudes and behavior in the area where the three lines of power, sexual status, and religion intersect.... Honor is the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) plus that person's value in the eyes of his own social group.... Honor is a claim to worth and the social acknowledgement of that worth.... When a person perceives that his or her actions do in fact reproduce the ideals of society, he

or she expects others in the group to acknowledge the fact, and what results is a grant of honor, a grant of reputation.”

(Malina 1981:27-29)

“[Shame] is a positive symbol, meaning sensitivity for one’s own reputation, sensitivity to the opinion of others. To have shame in this sense is an eminently positive value. Any human being worthy of the title “human”, any human group worthy of belonging to the family of man, needs to have shame, to be sensitive to its honor rating, to be perceptive to the opinion of others. On the other hand, a shameless person is one who does not recognize the rules of human interaction, who does not recognize social boundaries.”

(Malina,1981:44)

It is clear from the above that the honour of a person was “in the eyes of the beholder”. A person’s worth, honour and social status rested in the acceptance of others. ‘To have shame’ was considered sensitivity for one’s public reputation, a sensitivity to be acknowledged by others as honourable. On the other hand shame also had a negative connotation; a ‘shamed’ person had lost his honour (Malina & Neyrey 1991b:28).

In the Mediterranean world of the first century a person could obtain honour in two ways. Awarded honour was gained from being born in a certain family; a person didn’t have to do anything to receive this honour. Honour was also given to some people in a certain position, for instance in politics. Acquired honour was obtained by a person with some sort of achievement, e.g. military bravery. It was important for such a person to be brave, righteous and wise (Malina & Neyrey 1991b:28).

Honour was scarce; there was only a limited amount of honour that was divided between certain people. For a person to gain more honour, meant that someone else had to lose his honour. The most common way to gain honour is known as the social

interaction of “challenge-riposte” (Van Eck 2007a:85). The Pharisees challenged Jesus on numerous occasions (Mark 2:23-28; 3:22-30).

4.1.3 Dyadic personality

The Mediterranean world of the first century didn't acknowledge an individual. Every person formed part of the group that they belonged to, which usually was the family. A person was validated by the group; therefore it was important to know what the group's expectations were to ensure the individual's behaviour would be one of shame, a person who is sensitive about what others think of him or her (Van Eck 2007a:91). In a nutshell: “Mediterraneans are what anthropologists call ‘dyadic’; that is, they are other-orientated people who depend on others to provide them with a sense of who they are” (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:113) .

A man was always referred to as ‘son of’ or ‘brother of’, while a woman was referred to as ‘daughter of’ or ‘wife of’. (Mat 16:17; Luke 5:10) This is a clear indication that a woman always formed part of the honour of a man, either her father or her husband (Malina & Neyrey 1991a:61).

The problem with the first century dyadic personality is that a person is dependent on a group to define who or what he or she is. No individual were known by others in a personal, emotional or psychological way. People outside the particular group were always judged negatively. People from the same ethnicity but from a different area, in other words strangers, were always seen as potential enemies, and a person from a different ethnicity were a definite enemy (Malina & Neyrey 1991a:61-74).

4.2 Marriage customs

4.2.1 Endogamy and exogamy

Endogamy happens when a person marries someone within his/her own group. The group could be religious, ethnic, a certain community, etc. The advantage of endogamy is that few outsiders are brought into the group, so inheritance and property are not dissipated among too many people. Exogamy happens between members of different groups. The advantage of exogamy is that outsiders are constantly brought in, which might be desirable. Exogamy also means that

representatives of other, potentially hostile groups will enter the original group, exerting pressure to avoid conflicts (www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/def/endogamy-exogamy.htm).

Rules for endogamy, exogamy and incestuous relationships are means for cultures to express their identities, norms and differences (Schwartz 1997:83). There are no laws against or in favour of endogamy or exogamy in the Old Testament, it is only mentioned in passing, although an obvious preference for endogamy is seen in Gen. 24:4, Gen. 26:34, Gen. 28:2, Ezra 10 and Neh. 13. Endogamy was encouraged to help preserve a nation. While exogamy was condemned for religious reasons, there are several text passages that confirm the practice of exogamy (Gen 41:45, Ex 2:21, Ruth 1:4; 2, Sam 3:3; 11:3).

4.2.2 Patriarchal system

Patriarchy is a social system in which the father or eldest male is head of the household, having authority over women and children. Patriarchy also refers to a system of government by males, and to the dominance of men in social or cultural systems. It may also include a title being traced through the male line (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

In Israel the unmarried woman was under the authority of her father, while the married woman was under the authority of her husband (King & Stager 2001:50). A father had so much authority over the women in his household that he could even sell his daughter (Ex 21:7-11). After the marriage the wife had to leave her family and become part of her husband's family. Her children also belonged to her husband's family. In patriarchal cultures the woman indeed became the property of her husband (Weiss 1994:17).

4.2.3 Engagement

The engagement was the first stage of marriage, and could last several months (King & Stager 2001:54). The engagement was just as binding as the marriage itself (Satlow 2001:69). Sexual intercourse wasn't allowed before the marriage, it was expected of the female that she would be a virgin upon entering the marriage (Deut 22:13-21). Some texts deal with engagement and marriage as though it were the same thing (Deut 28:30; 2 Sam 3:14).

4.2.4 Mohar

A man had to pay mohar or a bride's fee to his father-in-law, which could be by means of money (Gen 34:12), service (Gen 29:15-30), or completion of a certain task (1 Sam 18:25-27). It was not a payment but rather a compensation gift for the loss of a daughter. If the husband passed away, the mohar had to provide for the wife to survive (King & Stager, 2001:54).

4.2.5 Wedding ceremony

The wedding ceremony wasn't a religious but rather a civil affair (Weis, 1994:19). The marriage was arranged by the parents and it was important that both families acknowledge and accept the matrimony and that the community was aware of the union. The purpose of the parade and celebration was to publicly announce the marital bond. Although there is no marriage contract to be found in the Old Testament, there are divorce regulations which show that a marriage contract possibly existed (Dorey 2003:68).

4.2.6 Prostitution

In the first-century Mediterranean world it was considered perfectly normal for married men to have sex with unmarried women. If a man wasn't satisfied by his wife or concubine, there were three possible sexual relationships that were accepted in the Ancient Near East's society: sacral prostitution, profane prostitution or a relationship with a companion (Human 2007:22).

Sacral or holy prostitution took place around the temple. Native women (and men) provided a sexual service to strangers. In this way they contributed to the Temple funds for religious purposes with their sexuality (Human 2007:22).

Profane prostitution was mostly practised by the poor or socially weak. These women operated under certain stipulated rules and had to pay taxes. They were typically found in cities and port areas (Human 2007:23).

Important men in society often had a female for sexual purposes and who would accompany them in public. These *companions* were usually educated and cultivated, and had knowledge of music, politics and philosophy. These women claimed financial support from their male companions. Married women were totally excluded

from public life. They did not have to be pretty or smart but certain qualities were essential (Human 2007:23).

4.3 Marriage in the Old Testament

Marriage in the Old Testament was not the same as we know it today. It was a civil rather than religious affair (King & Stager 2001:56). The aim here is to provide an overview of the various aspects of marriage. The overview will indicate that Old Testament customs regarding marriage are very similar to other cultures of the time and that the main reason behind marriage was not religious (Weiss 1994:19).

The Old Testament marriage was an agreement between two families, used for political and economic, reasons. It was designed to join two families that were willing to share their belongings and services for a long time. The main purpose of this extended process, mostly done by the fathers, was to reproduce. Confirmation of the marriage happened when the wife entered the man's house (Matthews & Benjamin 1993:13-14).

Although sexual intercourse played a big role, it did not confirm the marriage. The legal part of the marriage was not that important, couples got married without legal documents. Their family and friends knew that they were married and that was all that mattered. Even in communities where legal issues were important, questions and problems were solved by means of intuition and social criteria (Satlow 2001:73-74). Public knowledge of the marriage was important because, in order to protect the family's honour, the marriage had to be accepted by the families and the community.

4.3.1 Marriage strategies

Malina (1981:105-116) in (Van Eck 2007a:92) divided the history of Israel roughly into three periods, a patriarchal, an Israel, and a Jewish period, and associated a certain marriage strategy with each period. Although strategies of the three time periods strategies differed from one another, endogamy is the ideal in all three.

4.3.1.1 Patriarchal period

This period is known for the endogamy ideal: Abraham married his half sister (Gen. 20:12); Nahor married his brother's daughter (Gen. 11:27); Jacob married his uncle's daughter on his mother's side (Gen. 29:10). This marriage strategy was about reconciliation. Fathers gave their daughters as close to the core family as possible, without committing incest. Women were seen as a possession, to be 'used' to the advantage of men. Also notice the tenth commandment where a woman is listed with all the other possessions that a man owns (Ex 20:17) (Van Eck 2007a:93).

4.3.1.2 Israelite period

In the process of establishing the nation Israel in the 'holy land' numbers were very important. The Israelite period was known for an aggressive marriage strategy. Daughters were to marry men as close to the father's immediate family as possible, but still avoiding incest. Sons, on the other hand, married outside the family, with the condition that they stay part of the father's family after the wedding. In this way the father gained sons-in-law, daughters-in-law as well as grandchildren. This strategy was all about power, the loss or gain of a daughter brought about winners and losers. For the winner it meant a growth in numbers and ultimately political power (Van Eck 2007a:94).

The implications of the aggressive strategy of this period were that a daughter was still seen as a possession and had value in terms of what she could contribute for her father to gain power, honour and status. Polygamy was accepted as it contributed to the growing family. (Judges 8:30; 1 Sam. 25:39-43; 27:3; 2 Sam. 3:2-5; 1 Kings 11) Concubines were either purchased or won in battle (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

4.3.1.3 Jewish period

The marriage strategy of the Jewish period was defensive. According to Ezra and Nehemia the root of Judaism lay in the return of the Jews from exile. Consequently new symbols came into place, for instance the clear dividing line between Jews and non-Jews. Jewish exiles, who were married to non-Jews, were expected to divorce and marry Jews. The purpose of this defensive strategy was to maintain the covenant that God had with Israel, to bring about 'holy seed' by a 'holy nation' in a 'holy country'. 'Sexual hospitality' (Lev 19:29), homosexuality (Lev 18:22), and

marriage with women that were married before (Lev 21:7) brought shame over men, and were seen as a disgrace to God. Polygamy was still allowed in this time period (Van Eck 2007a:94).

According to Van Aarde (2006), the heterosexual marriage of today is not exactly 'Biblical'

“Die teenswoordige heteroseksuele huweliksvorm is as sodanig nie “bybels” nie. In die Bybel is daar meer as een huweliksvorm. Die vorm van die huwelik is medebepaal deur (1) geografiese “kulturaliteit”, bv. Semities en Grieks-Romeins en (2) veranderde tye, bv. ten tyde van die stammefederasie in die Rigterstydperk, die koningstydperk, die voor- en na-ballingskapydperk, die Hellenistiese, die Rooms-Katolieke en die Reformatoriese tydperke en daarna industrialisasie en post-industrialisasie (oftewel moderne en postmoderne tye).

Van Aarde (2006)

It is clear from the different marriage strategies that it is extremely problematic to talk about a Biblical marriage. The three time periods have the following in common: The ideal was endogamy, polygamy was still practised, and women were possessions that were used by men to gain honour, political and economic power. All this is very different from the post-modern marriage as it is known today.

4.3.2 Types of marriages

4.3.2.1 Monogamy and polygamy

Monogamy, the custom where one man has one wife, was the most common type of marriage in the Ancient Near East (De Vaux 1978:24). Polygamy, the practice of one man marrying more than one wife, was common in Old Testament, as confirmed by the examples of Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon. It appears that polygamy often occurred under men in leadership positions that could afford it (Patai 1959:40).

4.3.2.2 *Erebu marriage*

In Erebu marriages the husband lives with his wife in her father's domain. The plainest reference to this kind of marriage appears in the Assyrian Laws. Assyrian Law A:27 reads: "If a woman is residing in her father's house, [and] her husband pays visits to her, any settled property which her husband has given to her, he may take back; [but] he shall not touch what belongs to her father's house" (Driver & Miles 1975:399). Although this kind of marriage was not popular under Israelites we find reference to it in Judges 14:8 and 15:1-2 when Samson visited his wife in her father's house.

4.3.2.3 *Levirate marriage*

In levirate marriages the brother of a deceased man is obligated to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obligated to marry her deceased husband's brother. The first son born of this marriage is considered to be the deceased husband's. This was done to prevent the widow marrying an outsider. The purpose of this custom was to assure that the deceased's family name will be carried forward, and to prevent heritage to end up in the wrong hands, (Brown, 1993:134). Examples of the Levirate marriage is found in Deut. 25: 5-10, Gen. 38: 8 and Ruth 4: 1-12.

4.3.2.4 *Marrying a slave*

According to Kessler (2002:501-512) it is undeniable that a slave could be a man's wife at the same time. This is shown in Gen. 30:3-10 where Rachel gives her slave Bilhah to Jacob to bear her a son. Leah also gave her slave Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. It is furthermore acknowledged that a female slave is not necessarily the wife of a slave but could be married to a free man.

4.4 Marriage in the New Testament

In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament conveys that the divine community is no longer the family but the community of Christ and the fellowship of believers. Jesus declares that those who do the will of the Father are His true family (Matt. 12:50).

Although the New Testament replaces the importance of the family with the community of the church, it does not reject marriage. Marriage becomes an

important vehicle for the expansion of the community of believers. The family forms the context for wives to win over their unbelieving spouses and for godly parents' influence on their children. These families had an influence on the wider society and training of the next generation (Grenz 1990:60-61).

4.4.1 Jesus Christ

Jesus quoted Gen 2:24 in Matthew 19:3-12 (also in Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18) as a creation order from God. He interpreted Gen 2:24 as God who created marriage, and quoted Gen 2:24 to emphasize the unbreakable bond between a married couple (Meyers 2000:414).

Jesus was against the customs of His time and prohibited divorce (Collins, 1992:570). He reinterpreted adultery and equated it to divorce. According to patriarchal practice a man could only commit adultery against another man's marriage, and a wife against her own marriage. Jesus redefined adultery such that a man does not only commit adultery against another man's marriage but also against his own (Dorey 2003:72). Jesus also spoke about the patriarchal custom according to which a man could divorce his wife for any reason and marry another (Matt 19:3-12).

Loader (2005:45) notes that sexuality per se is nowhere under attack in the New Testament. Sexuality by itself is in effect just as moral or immoral as hands or feet or eyes. The question that Jesus brings to light is what we do with this sexuality and in what manner we co-exist with others. What the New Testament does say about sexuality and the way to express it, is still very relevant even in our post-modern world because it is about the attitudes and intentions that determines our actions (Loader 2005:45).

There are numerous examples where Jesus takes the spotlight away from the action to the intention that motivates the action and the attitude in which the action is carried out. (Matt 5:28) The question is what are the intentions and thoughts behind an action and whether it will contribute to the person's wellbeing (Loader 2005:46). We should therefore place more focus on the intentions of those involved instead of whether sex, pre-marital or in a marriage, is wrong or right.

4.4.2 Paul

In Paul's era questions regarding marriage, sexuality and celibacy were very relevant. Celibacy was regarded highly as a means to remain pure and religiously strong. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul encouraged his fellow believers to be like him, but advised them that it would be better to marry than to burn with desire. It is clear through verse 7, 8, 26, 27 and 38 that celibacy was very important to Paul (Meyers 200:111).

Paul told his male Corinthian readers they should not have sex with prostitutes. His argument was based on two assumptions: a Christian man is a member of the body of Christ; and sexual intercourse with a woman involves becoming one flesh with her. Therefore a Christian man cannot put himself in the impossible position of being both spiritually united with Christ and physically united with a prostitute.

It is clear from 1 Corinthians 7:2 that Paul is pro monogamy when he says: "every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband". In 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 Paul warns against sexual immorality. In verse 16 he quotes Genesis 2:24 to stress the union: "The two will become one body". A man that has sex with a prostitute becomes physically one with her. Sex establishes a permanent union between a man and a woman (Hays 1997:105). An assumption could be made that sexual intercourse with different women could suggest becoming one with each of them. Paul also quotes Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:31. In 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 Paul says a church leader or elder should "only have one wife".

4.4.3 Expectation of the return of Jesus

Marriage and having children are discouraged because they expected Jesus to return during their lifetime. Mark (Mark 13:14-23) suggests "How terrible it would be in those days for women who are pregnant and for mothers with little babies!" (Verse 17).

Paul tells the Corinthians to stay unmarried and devote all their time to the Lord's work, because a married man wants to please his wife and God, he will be pulled in two directions. The sadness of suffering, the meaningless and senselessness of marriage and descendants is sketched in the light of the imminent judgment day.

Children and marriage result in great sadness and become a burden in a time of oppression. Stay as you are (unmarried and without children), echo the message in the light of the judgment day (Hunter 1992:4).

4.4.4 Christian values: New ethics

Christianity proclaimed new ethics on a man's responsibilities and taught him to serve (Browning 2003:72). In Matthew 19:6 Jesus ruled out divorce, and so discredited the deliberate one-sided divorce by men, which was one of the main elements of the patriarchal rules. Jesus elevated the status of children (Matt 19:14), pointed out the dangers of wealth (Matt 19:23) and ordered His disciples to be servants (Matt 20:26). This is fundamental for those who want to be Christians.

These principles were also taught by Paul. Christians received a new status. There were no more Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, since all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). God had to be first, above anything or anyone (Matt 10:21-23; Mark 13:12-13; Luke 21-12-17).

The new Christian ethics demanded an attitude of humbleness and servitude of men, and with it acknowledgement of the value and significance of women and children. Christian faith made all people, men, women and children, equal (Dorey 2003:77).

4.5 Marriage in the Middle Ages to modern time

4.5.1 Church fathers

Augustine (354-430nC) said that a woman isn't the image of God, and the sooner a married couple withhold themselves from sexual intercourse the better (Friesen 1990:175). Tertullianus was against sex in a marriage and wondered why God ever allowed it in the first place (Friesen 1990:18). Origenes (185-254nC) castrated himself at a young age to get rid of sexual desires (Deschner 1080:252). Many of his followers did the same (Hunt 1959:103). In the two decades after Christ, the Church got so caught up with the evilness of women and sexual desires that sex and sin became almost synonymous (Hunt 1959:145).

By the seventh century Pope Gregarious declared that a couple is impure if they should gain any pleasure from sex. The sin of pleasure was twice as big as the sex deed itself (Friesen 1990:175).

According to De Bruyn (1995:485) even Luther and Calvin were very negative about sex and thought it sinful at first glance. Luther had campaigned for a positive reformation of marriage once his view of it began to change (Wengert 2004:171). Their opinion would influence the Protestant church greatly in years to come. Sexuality and women remained inferior until the Reformation (Dorey 2003:83).

4.5.2 Reformation (16th Century) - M Luther and J Calvin

With the Reformation in 1517 the authority of the Pope was undermined and that of the Bible elevated (*Sola Scriptura*). The Bible was translated into different languages and made accessible to the public, who mostly interpreted it literally (Dorey 2003:87).

4.5.2.1 *Martin Luther*

Luther resented the way the church made decisions concerning his body, his sexuality, and his relationships. Luther himself arranged for the marriage of all the nuns in a convent near his home. The last unmarried nun in the convent was a woman named Katharina von Bora. In 1525, Luther married her and they had a passionate relationship raising six children. Basing his arguments on the Scripture (Gen 2:18), Luther insisted that marriage was the intended state for men and women (Berry 2005:97).

Luther's reaction against celibacy played a big role in changing views on sexuality. For the first time 'reproduce and multiply' were preached from the pulpit. Martin Luther followed the teachings of Augustine and Aquinas by holding sexual desires accountable for the first sin in the Garden of Eden. In his opinion there would always be some degree of shame regarding sexual intercourse and that it is in some way always impure. According to Luther it was Satan that spoilt the beauty of sex that was created by God. The fall of man changed love into lust (Friesen 1990:189).

Initially Luther thought that marriage was a sacrament, although he later accepted that marriage was a gift from God. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church who

claimed the church should have sole right to marriage, Luther believed that marriage should be administered by the civil sector of government (Freucht 1961:67, 82). In his opinion marriage was an external, worldly matter similar to clothes, food, houses and property that had to be handed over to the authorities of the time (Luther 1530:265).

4.5.2.2 John Calvin

Calvin believed that a moral life is a product of faith. According to him marriage was instituted by God. It was not just a contract between two people that could be entered into and broken if necessary; he was of the opinion that it was a promise made in the name of the Lord. The purpose of marriage was the union of the couple in fidelity, love and faith (Van der Walt 1984:16).

Calvin was against the custom of marriages being arranged by parents (Van der Walt 1984:16). He said in article 8 of his marriage ordinance that no father or guardian must force his child into a marriage. Children should have the right to choose a partner themselves. For the youth freedom of choice about who they marry became a reality over time. The romantic side of marriage developed much later (Dorey 2003:90). According to Calvin, man's biggest problem is his tendency to commit sexual sins. Although he was pro marriage, he kept his perspective that sexual desires should be suppressed (Freisen 1990:193).

4.5.3 First marriage laws in England (1653)

Before the first marriage laws were promulgated in 1653, marriage in England was very similar to Isaac and Rebecca's marriage (Gen 24). It was a simple case of engagement or contract that was followed by sexual intercourse. Since there was no church or civil authorities that objected to the local customs, this practice was considered to be a legal marriage. In case of a private agreement the couple could just move in together and live together. Cohabitation was enough proof and confirmation that the man and woman were married and as such was accepted by the community (Freisen 1990:198).

Marriages like these were rejected by the Roman Catholic Church; all marriages had to be sanctified by a priest. In contrast private contracts were accepted by the Protestant Church of England. These contradicting conditions created confusion

(Freisen 1990:198). The private community marriages often caused mistreatment of women and they were often abandoned by their husbands (Freisen 1993:200). To put an end to the neglect, divorce and adultery, the first civil laws were endorsed in 1653. Mistreatment did however still continue (Dorey 2003:92). In order to stop the chaos the government issued a new legislation in 1753 (Hardwicke 1753, 1a).

4.5.4 Hardwicke Law 1753

The Hardwicke Law of 1753 law made it mandatory for all marriages to be performed by an Anglican priest or an appointed law administrator in a church or official office (Laslett,1971:154). All marriages had to be recorded in a register and both parties had to sign the register. Any previous marriages that had been accepted because of cohabitation or sexual intercourse up to that point were declared illegal. Young people under the age of 21 were not allowed to get married without consent from their parents or legal guardians. Although marriages took place in the church, it was controlled by civil courts. The legislation of 1753 made secret weddings impossible, all marriages had to be performed in public and had to be registered (Dorey 2003:94).

By handing over the control and management of marriages to the secular courts the concept of marriage changed throughout the Western Christian world (Freisen 1990:219).

4.6 Marriage today

Today's concept of marriage is very different from a hundred years ago, let alone two thousand years ago. We don't live in a patriarchal society, today men and women have equal rights. This is the era of individualism; we are no longer divined by a group. Our customs have also changed; polygamy, levirate marriages and erebu marriages are foreign to us. Yet the Bible still speak to this modern era.

In Song of Songs, the man and woman take turns praising and admiring each other and describing their intense longing for each other. What is unusual for Biblical times is that the woman plays the leading role by saying more than the man. In the light of today's partnership relationships, it is remarkable that a song coming from a

patriarchal society, places lovers on equal grounds, with the woman taking the lead as often as the man in initiating lovemaking (Du Toit 2007:124). This was unheard of for those days.

If we look closely, the Bible still provides guidelines for a healthy relationship. For many years Song of Songs were interpreted as the relationship between God and His people. It couldn't be clearer that the relationship in Song of Songs is between a man and a woman, and that is the way we are suppose to interpret it. Why would God allow such a controversial book in the Bible if it wasn't to teach us something? Isn't this relationship between this man and this woman supposed to be our role models?

CHAPTER 5 Biblical texts on Sexuality and Marriage

5.1 Old Testament

It is surprising to find that the Old Testament has plenty to say about sex and marriage. Usually we experience the Old Testament as a series of rules with do's and don'ts. Yet there are also a few surprising guidelines to be found in these ancient set books.

5.1.1 Genesis

Reading the creation story one would expect to find how the world was created and the creation of Adam and Eve. Once the text is studied closely there is also something to be found about the creation of human sexuality. Yes, in the beginning God also created sex as well as some form of marriage.

The second creation story in Genesis 2 relates three fundamental aspects about marriage. Firstly, it is the most important relationship between people. For the sake of marriage “a man leaves his father and his mother.” Secondly, marriage is designed to be a lasting union, which is indicated by the words “cleave to” and even more so that husband and wife “become one in flesh,” entering into a deep and unbreakable unity (v.24). Thirdly, it involves an intimacy of fellowship even at the most basic physical level; they are naked to one another without shame (v.25) (Bromiley 1980:4).

God created human beings as male and female, both in His own image (Gen1:27). “The fact that the human being in its sexual bipolarity is the image of God raises the question whether the biblical God of creation is a sexual being too. It is, however, remarkable that this is not the case, even though Yahweh is in some respects a fertility deity” (Kortner 2008:2010).

5.1.2 Ecclesiastes

The tone of Ecclesiastes is initially pessimistic and depressing. “Life is useless, all useless” (Ecc. 1:2). Yet the philosopher is ahead of his time, speaking truths that is still relevant for today. Happiness cannot be linked to things (such as money or

status) or values (such as obeying the law), but is experienced in the goodness of life.

Nothing in life was certain, therefore one had to take good care of yourself by taking in every single drop of joy life passes your way. “So I realized that all we can do is to be happy and do the best we can while we are still alive” (Ecc. 3:12) (Le Roux 2003:333). In this process a woman’s body plays a significant role. Enjoy life with the woman you love. This is a direct order from the Philosopher! With the woman you love, you should lose yourself; you should move with the flow of the body, you should embrace her whole body and enjoy the pleasures it holds. And he, who enjoys the body entirely, mastered the art self-nurturing and learned to take care of the whole person.

Ecclesiastes emphasizes the value of this pure pleasure by means of two important threats: the meaninglessness of life and the transiency of life. Both emphasize the urgency to fully enjoy the other’s body (Le Roux 2003:333).

An important theme in Ecclesiastes is that a person should learn to cherish him/her self. This is what makes life beautiful and what gives meaning to life. Every attempt to make life beautiful, the woman, especially her body is indispensable. The pleasure of being intimate pushes the meaninglessness of life on the background, out of sight. Since life does not end meaningfully, it is important to enjoy the body completely. It was a way of dealing with meaninglessness (Le Roux 2003:334).

5.1.3 Deuteronomy

It was sad when somebody would die young without enjoying the pleasures of the body. For this reason the author of Deuteronomy advises that “When a man is newly married, he is not to be drafted into military service or any other public duty; he is to be excused from duty for one year, so that he can stay home and make his wife happy” (Deut 24:5). This good life was a reality, and it wasn’t only meant for a group of selected people, but everyone could enjoy life’s fullness (Le Roux 2003:337).

“Is there anyone here who is engaged to be married? If so, he is to go home. Otherwise, if he is killed in battle, someone else will marry the woman he is engaged to.” (Deut 20:7) When two people’s physical joy led to a deeper emotional joy and

peace, something of God was experienced. Therefore Israel had to deal differently with the engaged and married. An arrangement had to be made to ensure that nobody would die young without ever tasting the body of the other. That was the will of God. (Le Roux 2003:337)

5.1.4 Proverbs

The wisdom teacher of Proverbs studied everyday life to determine what kind of behaviour produced a happy or a sad life. The conclusion of his study was a warning against bodies that do not comfort each other. Those bodies should be avoided. (Le Roux 2003:338)

In Proverbs 7:6 the author tells one of a night when he looked out of his window, noticing a foolish young man walking “along a street near the corner where a certain woman lived” (Prov. 7:8). The way this woman was dressed gave away her intentions. She lured the young man by the way she acted. Her husband was away and she was looking for someone to satisfy her lust. “She threw her arms round the young man and kissed him” (Prov. 7:13). Then she told him that she spent the whole day looking for him, that she made her offering and that there was leftover meat from the sacrifice that she wanted to share with him, that she had new bedding that she wanted to show him, and that he need not be afraid – her husband is out of town. And then she told him what she really wanted from him “Come on! Let’s make love all night long. We’ll be happy in each other’s arms” (Prov. 7:18).

In spite of the smooth talking and the inviting sound of it, this is not happiness. There is nothing that ties the two bodies together. Nothing good can come from two bodies that join in sex when there is no mutual love. Loveless bodies cannot comfort each other or make each other happy. He who joins his body with another without love, is “like an ox on the way to be slaughtered” “like a bird going into a net” (Prov. 7:22-23). It is easy to fall into this trap, which is why the author warns against sleeping with someone you do not love. This “has been the ruin of many men and caused the death of too many to count” (Prov. 7:26).

5.1.5 Song of Songs

The rabbis questioned the place of the Song of Songs in the Canon because of the book’s erotic language and the difficulty of its interpretation. The positive resolution

of that debate is reflected in the famous declaration of Rabbi Akiva, “The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies” (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

For much of Church history many interpreters felt compelled to find in the Song an allegory of sacred love between God and Israel, Christ and the Church, or Christ and the soul. In the modern period most scholars have returned to a literal reading of the Song although conflict remains even about the literal sense of the text. A recent, promising approach shows that the Song itself gives expression to a uniquely biblical perspective on sexual love.

In the same way as Gen. 2:23-25, the Song celebrates God’s gift of bodily love between man and woman. Similar to many Psalms that praise God and also teach, the Song’s main purpose is to celebrate rather than to instruct (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003).

5.2 New Testament

Two thirds of New Testament books say something directly or indirectly about sexuality. Things like sex (Luc 1:34), virginity (Luc 1:26,34), two people sleeping on one bed (Luc 17:34), sleeping naked (Rev 16:15), engagement (Luc 1:27) and other sexual related topics are mentioned in the New testament. However, it is important to remember that these different reverences to sexuality in the New Testament are diverse. Steyn (2006:131-134)

Although it has been argued that the New Testament doesn’t give us all the answers for our ethical questions, there is still clues to be found on how people can be both sexual creatures and Christians at the same time. New Testament Biblical writers instruct that true sexual happiness is inextricably linked to sexual holiness as believers live their lives before God. (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2003).

5.2.1 Paul

Paul was not overly enthusiastic when it came to marriage. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 he advises those who cannot control themselves to go ahead and get married. If you

read in-between the lines of 1 Timothy 4:1-4 Paul declares, while I'm not a big fan of marriage, I'm also against people who forbid others from getting married. Yet you should model your marriage after Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:21-23). And remember, if you do get married, your body belongs to your spouse, and vice versa. (1 Corinthians 7:3-3) Often the body is referred to as "flesh" which is the source of sin. Physical bodies and sinful natures have been seen as synonymous. It seems like a way to avoid responsibility when the body is blamed, or even sexual desire, for the sin that may have been committed (Berry 2005:59).

At times, Paul seems to contradict himself. For example, he says that men should demonstrate their ability to manage their own household to qualify for church leadership. He also seems to promote opposing ideas about women in leadership, as he commends specific women who are in ministry, while forbidding women to speak in church (Berry 2005:53).

Paul also offered his opinion on purity. In Romans 7:5-7 he states that one's flesh is a source of sin. "I know that good does not live in me – that is, in my human nature. For even though the desire to do well is in me, I am not able to do it" (Rom. 7:18). And yet 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 says Jesus is manifested in the body. How can Jesus be part of something that is allegedly sinful by nature?

In 1 Corinthians 11:13 Paul states that a woman shouldn't attend church without covering her head, in addition women aren't allowed to talk in church and may not lead meetings (1 Cor 14:34). Today however, the church has no problem with women not covering their head in church; women often hold an office in the church and even preach. These two statements of Paul are irrelevant today because we read these texts in cultural context, interpreting them without mixing gospel and culture. Yet when it comes to ethical topics like marriage, the church and society has difficulty separating gospel and culture.

It is clear from the description given above on marriage in the first-century Mediterranean world that culture played a big part in what is said about marriage in the Bible. Can we still take everything that is said in the Bible about marriage, divorce and adultery and draw a parallel to our post-modern lives? (Van Eck 2007c:481-483).

5.2.2 Jesus' viewpoint on marriage

Let us investigate Jesus' point of view on marriage. Does Jesus say anything as far as marriage as institution in a post-modern society is concerned? Jesus' statements about marriage and related topics like levirate marriage, adultery and divorce are found in Mark 12:18-27 (parallel Matt 22:23-33; Luc 20:27-40) Mark 10:2-12 (parallel Matt 5:31-32; Matt 19:3-12; Luke 20:27-40) and Matt 5:27-28. (Van Eck 2007:484-485). These statements can be categorized in two parts: Mark 10:5-9 and Matt 19:4-6 & 8 can be seen as the essence of marriage or Jesus' view of marriage as a social institution. In Mark 10:11-12 and Matt 19:9 the focus is more on adultery, divorce and remarrying.

Mark 10:5-9 and Matthew 19:4-6 & 8

“Jesus answered, “Haven't you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? And God said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one.' Jesus answered, “Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation.” (Matt 19:4-6 & 8)

What does Jesus mean by his statement? Does it tell us something about marriage? If it does say anything about marriage does it contain critique on their culture? What about patriarchy, endogamy and polygamy? Does Jesus say anything about sexuality in marriage (two become one)? These are important questions that should be critically answered in order to determine whether Jesus had an opinion about marriage, and if He had, what His intention with the institution of marriage was (Van Eck 2007c:487).

Luke 16:18, Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11-12 and Matthew 19:9

The interpretation of these texts is even more complex. According to Luke 16:18a and Mark 10:11 a man commits adultery when he divorces his wife and marries another. Matthew 19:9 concludes that divorce is acceptable in the case of unfaithfulness. The numerous arguments on the interpretation of these texts makes it essential to answer these questions in order to deduce Jesus' opinion about marriage, adultery and divorce.

Collins (1992:103) explains that what we find in Mark 10:2-12 and Matthew 19:3-12 is not Jesus, but the Jesus of the New Testament: “In all, the Jesus of the New Testament’s literary tradition proclaims a counter cultural stance” (Collins 1992:103). Malina (1991:120-121) is of the opinion that Luke 16:18 should be read as a parable. In his view Jesus saw marriage as a blood-related union, therefore a bond that cannot be broken. Divorce was never an option and therefore a second marriage would be seen as adultery.

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:120-122, 240-242) maintains that marriage should be regarded as a blood-related union, Luke 16:18 should not be read as a parable. To regard this passage as a parable would mean that Jesus disapproved of divorce and remarriage, although in fact his disapproval rather lies with divorce with the intention to remarry, as this would imply adultery.

5.2.2.1 Jesus’ teachings

Instone-Brewer (2002:177-178) mentions six aspects of marriage that Jesus covered in his teachings:

1. Marriage should only be monogamist (two become one),
2. Marriage is a lifelong union (unite with his wife),
3. Divorce is not compulsory in case of adultery,
4. Divorce is allowed if adultery continue (other than unfaithfulness),
5. Marriage is not compulsory therefore infertility is not a reason for divorce,
6. Because divorce for any other reason than persistent adultery is not accepted, remarriage after divorce (for any other reason than adultery) would imply adultery (Instone-Brewer 2002:137-177 in Van Eck 2007c:491-493).

It is impossible to determine with any certainty exactly what Jesus said about marriage and if we were sure of what He said, what did He mean?

We can assume that, in terms of Mark 10:2-12 and Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus said the following about marriage: Moses wrote this law (for men to divorce their wives) because men were so callous. However, at the beginning of creation God made male and female, and when they got married a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, and the two will become one. Nobody should separate what

God have joined, therefore a man who divorces his wife and remarries, commits adultery against his wife, and a wife who divorces her husband and remarries, commits adultery against her husband. Thus marriage has the potential to create victims, which is why it might be better not to marry but to stay celibate (Van Eck 2007c:505).

5.2.2.2 *What did Jesus mean?*

Jesus' answer on the Pharisees' question implies that he actually does not say anything about marriage, adultery, divorce and remarriage. More specific: Jesus does not say whether people are allowed to divorce or not. The question afforded Jesus the opportunity to expose what was behind the first-century understanding of marriage. Jesus did not approve of the prevailing honour and shame culture, the patriarchal family, the hierarchical society and marginalization of woman and children. Mark 10:11 and Matthew 19:9 is about far more than whether Jesus approved of divorce or not. It is about gospel against culture (Van Eck 2007c:508).

More than that could not be deduced, because Jesus refrained from any clear enunciation. The fact is that we cannot use what Jesus said about marriage for ethical answers on today's questions about marriage, divorce and adultery.

But if asked whether people should get married, Jesus would probably have answered: If the institution of marriage is chosen, men and women should be regarded as equal. Marriage should promote both partners. That means that marriage should never be patriarchal, polygamous or hierarchical. As institution, marriage does bear the potential and temptation to leave, in a so-called legitimate manner, victims along the way (Van Eck 2007c:509).

CHAPTER 6 Sexual and Marital Ethics

6.1 Ethical dilemma

The traditional, heterosexual, monogamous marriage is being questioned, not only as a result of the different modern practices concerning sexual relationships but also because of the inconsistency and sometimes contradictions found in the Bible itself. It cannot be stated that the “Bible says...” and then only give one viewpoint of the topic in question. Modern society questions the fact that the traditional marriage should be seen as the only moral and lawful option where a permanent love relationship between two people may exist. The complexity of relationships in modern society isn't being accommodated in the traditional marriage (Viviers 2006:90).

The church is nowadays confronted with much divergence of opinions about sexual relationships and marriage. The reality of our society raises the question whether the traditional understanding of marriage is still relevant to guide believers to make meaningful and responsible choices. Over the past four decades Western society underwent big changes concerning family patterns. A rise in divorce figures is evident, as is the number of children being born out of wedlock, cohabitation and homosexuality (Dreyer 2008:483). Consequently the traditional two-parent families become fewer and fewer, while teen pregnancies, abortions, HIV/AIDS and pornography escalate. The question is whether we should see these changes as part of a changing society or as a moral crisis. What role should the church play in these ethical changes (Dreyer [2008]:483)?

The negative view on sexual intimacy started in the early church, where they taught that sex is meant for procreation and not for enjoyment. Sex was always treated as something that should not be talked about, especially not in church. Vardy summarizes the moral norms on sexuality that played a major role in the church for several centuries:

- Sex before marriage is wrong;
- Homosexual behaviour is wicked;
- Adultery is against the law of God;

- Masturbation is a grave sin;
- The main purpose of sex is procreation;
- Sex is only acceptable within the marriage of one man and one woman;
- A woman has a duty to provide sexual access to a man if she is married to him;
- Sex is to be treated with suspicion and as a temptation;
- Celibacy is a higher ideal than married life.

(Vardy 1997:xi)

Although most of these views have been overcome in the last few decades the church is faced with new challenges in the present milieu which require reflection on existing theologies.

1. The increasing divorce rate along with remarrying of divorcees, raise the question whether the traditional view of marriage as a life-long commitment, is still relevant under all circumstances.
2. Premarital sex already became an acceptable norm under young adults, which forces one to look into the church's opinion of the meaning and purpose of sexual intimacy.
3. The increasing number of cohabiting couples in the church, living together in a trial marriage, or even as an alternative for marriage, requires new theological reflection on different types of marriages.

(Dreyer 2008:485)

Interpreting these questions depends mainly on one's perspective and treatment of the Scriptures. If the Bible is seen as a timeless book, the moral-ethical codes found in the Bible should then in the same way be implemented today. If, however, the Bible is understood as a historical book, which is written in a certain context, the different contexts of the Bible should be interpreted hermeneutically to attempt to hear what the Word of God has to say for our time (Dreyer 2008:486).

Traditional answers to questions on sex and marriage no longer satisfy sexual morals of post-modern times. How many of these answers have evangelic value, and to what extent are they influenced by historical context? The traditional views on marriage and sex are without a doubt influenced by historical context; in order to find Biblical values that are applicable for current situations, further probing is required.

The creation stories in Genesis are often misused to support views on sexuality and marriage. From a patriarchal perspective these writings are interpreted in a way that ranked men “above” women. The female is seen as the seductress who was lured away from the truth by Satan and therefore is responsible for man’s disobedience. In this way sex is also seen as sin, were the female is always inferior and dependent on a man. Becoming one in flesh is interpreted as a woman becoming part of the flesh, and thus the identity of a man. The foundation of this idea is based on the Genesis text where the man is created first and the woman is made from the man’s body (Dreyer 2008:486).

Careful reading of the Genesis text in its own context, indicates that this is not the purpose of these texts and that the above standpoint cannot be deduced from the creation story. Although the church has done this for many years, it is clearly problematical to base today’s marriages directly on Biblical customs and practices.

The church fathers started the notion that being human consists of two separate parts, the physical and the spiritual. This led to scepticism of the physical aspects of the body like sexual activities, since the physical body should be inferior to the higher spiritual values. For this reason a negative perspective of sexuality and marriage was created and procreation was deemed the only valid reason for sex. Not only was extramarital sex wrong, but a man who had sex with his wife without the purpose of procreation, also committed adultery (Dreyer 2008:491).

During the Middle-ages it was decided that every Christian had to confess their sins to a priest at least once a year. These confessions focused mainly on sexual misconduct. Strict rules were stipulated to control the practice of sexual activities. For instance, sex was not allowed anywhere near prayer occasions, neither was it

allowed during the forty days of Lent, the forty days of Advent, or the eight days after Christmas (Payer 1993:98-102).

Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) explained the purpose of human genitals as procreation and came to the following conclusions:

- No artificial pregnancy control may be used, because it would defy the purpose of sex, namely procreation.
- Masturbation is sinful, as the genitals aren't used for the intended purpose of procreation.
- Homosexual deeds are also sinful for the same reason; rape is seen as a lesser sin since genitals are at least used for the intended purpose.
- Sexual intercourse is not a way of showing love; its only purpose is procreation.

(Dreyer 2008:492)

This view of Thomas Aquinas was approved and implemented by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle-ages. Marriage was raised to a sacrament. Later on marriage was seen as a goal in its own right, therefore sexual intercourse between a husband and wife was part of marriage and no longer the purpose of marriage. Luther even considered marriage higher than celibacy.

“Although Luther endorses marriage between Christians and non-Christians and even calls marriage a worldly thing, he is not trying to secularize marriage in the sense of separating it from God or religion. It is no longer a sacrament, to be sure, but marriage is intended by God for most people and, as we have seen, it is the genuinely religious form of life.”

(Hendrix in Winger 2004:170)

6.2 Legal marriage or religious marriage debate

One of the main problems of contemporary sexual ethics is the question whether the church should acknowledge non-marital long-term relationships and under which circumstances it should do so.

The debate about cohabitation has two possible solutions. One possibility is that the church can decide to treat cohabitation situations which have all the characteristics of a good marriage, as a real marriage. This would be very difficult to control through the synod; however, the church could provide guidelines to ministers to apply in their ministries at their own discretion, according to each individual case.

Another possibility would be to separate a religious marriage from a constitutional marriage, similar to many other countries that practise this. If this was the case, senior citizens could have a church wedding without being married legally and therefore wouldn't suffer the loss of the pension of one of the partners. The question is how members of the church can live responsibly before God with the decision they made (Beeld, 2009/12/09).

“The question, consequently, is whether the church sees itself as a people's church or a minority church, whether it – as a church for others – wants to be church for everyone or primarily for fringe groups and whether it perceives itself as part of society or as the demonstrative counterpart of society”

(Körtner 2008:212).

Müller (2002:81-86) stresses the fact that the church should put emphasis on significant events in the lives of people. It is especially these significant events with a spiritual dimension that could have great value for believers. An engagement ceremony, in the form of simply announcing a couple's engagement and introducing them to the church community, could have great spiritual value for the couple. The church could also pray for the blessing of their relationship in the ceremony. Before

the ceremony the couple should be counselled on their decision to live together to make sure both understand the implications.

In this way the church sends out the message that cohabitation shouldn't necessarily be seen as wrong. By way of an orderly, churchly manner people could then live their lives guilt free. The honesty and integrity of people who take this step should satisfy the church (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:659).

6.3 Is marriage starting to diminish?

British relationship researchers (Relate) predict that the institute of marriage will disappear over the next thirty years. They estimate that in thirty years, approximately only one in five British couples would be married and eight out of ten children will be born out of wedlock. Over the past 160 years fewer and fewer people got married each year and 40% of these marriages ended in divorce. This is no surprise, as the taboo that society placed on cohabitation and divorce, has become something of the past.

Even in South Africa things have changed drastically. Professor Rose September of the University of the Western Cape reports that couples tend to live together rather than get married. These days marriage is only one of a number of options, now that there is no longer a stigma around cohabitation (Rapport, 09/06/2002 p. 21).

More liberal churches have no problem marrying couples that do not want to get married legally, whatever their reasons, but has the desire for a religious wedding. The Dutch Reformed Church does not approve thus far. Rev. Kosie Delpont, actuary of the Western Cape NG synod, states that the Dutch Reformed Church will only marry a couple with the condition that a lawful marriage is incorporated. He said the church discourages such marriages because it gives a sense of false security. Although the couple think of themselves as being married in God's eyes, nothing legally binds them. Women are especially vulnerable in these instances. Rev. Delpont admits that the Bible does not provide specifics on the form marriage should take, but regards acknowledgement by society as important (Rapport, 09/06/2002 p. 21).

Whether or not the institution of marriage will disappear, depends on how you define marriage. Dr H. Scott said that it is his belief that the institution of marriage will never really die out completely. There might develop a different type of rules, but there will still be some sort of permanent relationship that could be described as marriage in some form (Rapport, 09/06/2002 p. 21).

6.4 God's wish for husband and wife

It is clear from this study that it would be very difficult to exactly determine the will of God. Nevertheless, by careful consideration of what the Bible tells us, an exegesis can come as close as possible to what could be considered as God's wish. An overall assumption would be that it is God's wish for sex to take place in a loving long-term relationship, whether it is in a marriage as we know it today or not, as long as He is part of that relationship.

According to the Bible God's ultimate goal with marriage is to enter into covenantal fellowship with human beings who thereby enjoy community with each other and with the Creator (Grenz 1990:58). The Old Testament testifies to God's desire that a natural fellowship should arise between Adam and Eve in the garden, a fellowship that God the Creator would likewise enjoy (Grenz 1990:59).

There are clear roles for the husband and wife (partners) within Scripture. The Bible describes the marriage that pleases God in terms of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:1-4). Mutual submission is to be expressed differently by the husband and the wife. The husband should practise self-denying, nurturing love modelled after Christ (Eph. 5:15-33). He is the initiator and is responsible for leading his wife with wisdom and understanding. He also has to protect, provide for, and honour her (1 Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:19). A wife should express her submission by following her husband's leadership with respect (Eph. 5:22-33; Col.3:18), maintaining a pure and reverent life with a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:1-6) (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2003).

Marriage grows out of love between husband and wife and is maintained by love and faithfulness. Only love makes it possible for a couple to be compassionate, committed, caring, self-giving and forgiving. I believe that such a relationship/marriage is pleasing to God.

6.5 Eternal values found in the Bible

Dr. A van Niekerk, a specialist in ethics, mentions prescribed marital values taught in the Bible, including love, fidelity, permanence and mutual respect. Equality may be more important to some than others, referring to the Bible's view that marriage is a union between equal partners. Others feel that the husband should be the head of the house and a wife should be submissive (Beeld 2009/12/09).

“The guiding principle status of matrimony is rooted in the fact that it is based on voluntariness, reciprocity and equality, that is, it is based on affection and love, which involve the partners' entire lives and not only parts of them. Marriage is celebrated as being binding and meant to last for an indefinite duration, that is, it is based on faithfulness and offers reliability in all circumstances, even in times of crises and conflicts.”

(Körtner 2008:217)

For the church to consider accepting non-marital relationships, they should have the same characteristics and values than a marriage. The values that the Bible teaches for God-worthy relationships should be applicable to all relationships. Socially and ethically a partnership that resembles a marriage deserves respect, protection and recognition, as long it is ethically justified in a way that bears analogy to matrimony and is exercised in a responsible way. It has to be assumed that the couple plan to live together permanently with personal devotion and faithfulness (Körtner 2008:219).

Steyn (2006:131) names particular features that Christian' sexuality should display as found in the New Testament. These could serve as guidelines for Christian sexuality in the twenty-first century.

“Christian' sexuality... , expresses its freedom responsibly; is driven by divine love; surrenders sacrificially to the other as Christ did; treats its partner as an equal and not as an object of self satisfaction; distinguishes itself from different cultural practices with an identity of its own; acknowledges the fact that it is part of an incomplete world; respects the identity of the other and despises all kinds of sexual malpractices; believe in forgiveness; and finds its climax ultimately and always in the presence of God.”

Steyn (2006:131).

Permanency, faithfulness, true love, loyalty, security, and support are a few characteristics of a God-worthy, healthy relationship whether the people in such a relationship are married or not. These are most definitely eternal values.

6.6 Fidelity and promiscuity

According to Christian sex ethics, sex practised by a married person with someone other than one's spouse, is a symbol of the violation of the marriage covenant. Ought sexual intercourse to be limited to the marital bond, or are there legitimate contexts for its practice outside of marriage (Grenz 1990:98)?

Fornication can best be described as an unmarried person having sex with someone of the opposite sex. Adultery occurs when married people have sex with someone of the opposite sex other than the person to whom they are married (Hall 2008:3).

A modern definition regards adultery as the violation of the marriage vows, specifically the promise to be sexually faithful to one's spouse. Unlike Old Testament times, either partner can be unfaithful because both are seen as equal participants in the marriage contract. In Biblical times, only the wife could be guilty of such a

charge. It was impossible for a man to violate his own marriage. This had to do with property rights, as a woman was part of a man's properties.

A more contemporary outlook on marriage is open to sexual relations beyond the marriage bond. For the well-being of both partners, physical, emotional and even sexual needs can be fulfilled outside the marriage. The idea of an open marriage is based on the argument that it is impossible for one person to be the source of total fulfilment for another. Therefore you may explore and search for fulfilment of different needs from different people.

The Bible and entire Christian tradition teach that only God is our final resting place. Augustine said that a restlessness remains in the human heart until it finds rest in God. The New Testament also affirms that not only the marriage bond but above all the fellowship of the people of God in the church brings true fulfilment (Grenz 1990:104-105).

Is there some universal norm for sexual acts or is it determined situationally? In Joseph Fletcher's book "Situation Ethics" (1966:57) he argues that there is no norm except love that would apply to all interpersonal relationships. Decisions concerning the sex act should be taken in each situation in accordance with the sole norm of love.

Christian traditions reject the pure situational approach to sex ethics. Grenz (1990:108-109) states certain principles to guide ethical decisions. Promiscuity tends to separate 'what I do' from 'what I am.' The body is often seen as a tool or vehicle for the use of the person. In this view, people become sex objects instead of persons with worth and value.

According to biblical understanding, man is created by God as a whole. Therefore acts of the body cannot be separated from acts of the person, implying that sexual intercourse is an act of the person as a whole (Grenz 1990:112).

Genesis 2:24 states that a man and a woman becomes one; this can only be true for two people to become one flesh – there isn't any room for a third party. Calvin (1948:136:137) argues that polygamy is corruption of the monogamous marriage.

The Bible promotes a specific sex ethic as the ideal for humankind. According to Genesis 2 this ideal was part of the original intent of the creation. Jesus reaffirmed the ideal of His father in Matthew 19:4-6. The early Christian community continued the practice. (1 Cor 7:2; 1 Thess. 4:3-6; 1Tim 3:2) It is located in the apocalyptic vision of the eschatological renewal as well (Rev 21:2, 9-10).

6.7 The Church's stance

Unmarried couples "...are caught somewhere between the culture's sexual 'do everything' and the Church's 'do virtually nothing'" (Cahill 2001:170) This restricted understanding of sex is summarised by Grey & Selling, stating that young persons are still being told that sex is dangerous, cheap and a serious source of moral guilt, unless one is married, which somehow makes the very same acts legitimate, although not really all that nice (Grey & Selling 2001:189 in Muller & Pienaar 2003:145).

Recent articles in Beeld (2010) brought attention to the issues around marriage and cohabitation, a subject of concern for many South Africans. In the author's experience South Africans are far more conservative than the average American or European. The inherited value system seems to be a few years behind the rest of the world. However, South African society has become far more lenient over the past few years on subjects like sex before marriage, homosexuality and cohabitation. Churches are now even considering to accept couples living together before they are married.

The article which appeared in Beeld on 27 May 2010 explained the essence of the recent debate. According to Jackson the question is not whether marriage is the best milieu for a life-long relationship between two people; in his view everyone is in agreement on that. Neither is it about whether the church should approve immoral sexual behaviour. A few individuals shared their experiences and gave their opinion

about marriage. It was clear that, although marriage is the ideal for many people, it was not always possible, considering their personal circumstances. Unfortunately many people became pessimistic about marriage, mostly because married people – believers and non-believers - are giving marriage a bad name. Consequently more people tend to cohabit, either as a trial period to foresee marriage prospects, however, in some instances, marriage is never an option.

The question seems to be how the church should think about these instances – especially those displaying all the characteristics of a healthy marriage, except for the fact that the couple isn't legally married. These relationships have mutual love, freedom and security and both partners see it as a life-long commitment.

Within the church there is disagreement on the matter; one group considers cohabitation in long-term, stable relationships immoral and sinful. They are of the opinion that the couple should confess their sin in order to receive God's grace and then marry so that they don't live in sin any longer.

The other group believes that words like sin, guilt, repentance and forgiveness should be replaced with a different language of faith, which should include the healing of broken people, and a ministry that would lead people to spiritually good relationships. In many cases people who live together have healthier relationships than married people; often they are believers who are active in the community and the church.

The question is whether the church should look past the legitimacy of the relationship and acknowledge it as something that is in essence already a marriage. The church's viewpoint concerning human sexuality has changed continually throughout its history. As the church became a dominant influence in society, its attitude towards sexuality has always had a strong cultural influence on society. Therefore, a decision on the treatment of cohabiting couples by the church is bound to have a profound influence on society, but it will also be a watershed decision for the continued existence of the church itself.

6.8 Sexual ethics

Whether sexual partners are married or not, certain sexual ethics should apply. Barnard (2000:144) points out four guidelines for ethically acceptable and responsible behaviour.

1. *Respect* means to give the other person enough space to truly be who they are. In this way the totality of that person's humanity is respected.
2. *Serving* suggests that each person share their life and sexuality with the other. In this context sex would mean to give yourself to the other person without owning the person.
3. Thirdly we could refer to *security*. In the text of Genesis 2 a sense of security is noted. In this context an atmosphere of security exists when two people become one by expressing their sexuality. Security in such a relationship results in for instance mutual involvement, a safe environment and responsible sexual practices.
4. And the biggest of them all is *LOVE*. In the Old Testament the basic norm for all human relationships is love. This also applies to sexual relationships. This kind of love includes mutual acceptance – unconditional acceptance. No relationship, especially not a sexual relationship could survive without love. This implies mutual give and take, deep sensitivity, a promise of fidelity and a longing to become one.

(Barnard 2000:144)

CHAPTER 7 FINDINGS

7.1. Relevant findings

The time has come to portray sex and marriage in a new way. Instead of avoiding, denying and shaming the subject let us embrace it and educate the youth as well as couples and married people, young and old. Let us say what needs to be said, and teach what needs to be taught.

“How wonderful sex can be,
When men keep it powerful and sacred,
and it fills the world!
Like sunshine through and through one!”

D H Lawrence

7.1.1 Law or Love?

John 8 is about a woman who was caught red handed in adultery. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought this woman to Jesus, explaining what she did and what Moses commanded in the Law on this subject. This woman meant nothing to them; the most important thing was the Law and the fact that they so rigidly adhering to it, whatever the cost. The Pharisees tried to lure Jesus into judging this woman and condemning her to death by stoning (Müller 2007:374).

Jesus' responded by writing in the sand. The sand of Palestine is probably the worst medium possible to write on, because the words are only briefly visible. Within a few minutes the wind would blow them away. He purposely wrote in the sand to symbolize that the Law, which was so important to them, was also transient. He knelt down next to the woman and asked who would throw the first stone, symbolizing solidarity with her and sending a message that the woman was more important to Him than the Law. And then, when He did say something, it was not to criticize or lecture her on her sin (Müller 2007:374). Instead, He embraced her with His love and told her “Go, but do not sin again” (John 8:11).

In the fundamentalist theology a simple, single line exists; a line that authorizes the legal marriage, involving the state and a church ceremony. On the one side of the line sexual intercourse is sinful; on the other side of the line sex is good, healthy and necessary. This line separates the sinners and the good people (Müller 2007:374). This theory can no longer apply to modern society. Young Christians have adopted a better value system; responsible sex forms part of a steady love relationship. This type of relationship is a more responsible Biblical approach than the legalistic approach that encourages the juridical marriage as the only norm for sexual intercourse. Norms for sexual intercourse should be sought on a deeper level than just the line of the juridical marriage (Müller 2007:374).

7.1.2 Marriage as a process

The big question regarding marriage is: when is the start of a marriage? The way people think about marriage today differs immensely from the way they thought about marriage in pre-modern times. Today the wedding ceremony is regarded as the start of a marriage. Throughout this study it became clear that marriage cannot be compared to a race with a starting point and end point, but should rather be viewed as a process.

The wedding ceremony is the public announcement of the couple's love and devotion towards each other, which started a long time ago. That is why cohabiting is in fact not bad or wrong, because it *could* be part of the marriage process. If however cohabiting is merely a convenient arrangement without any future plans, or when it becomes a substitute for marriage, it is not part of the marriage process, and could lead to many problems. (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:678).

Marriage and the forms of sexual expression and encounter that are an intimate part of that relationship are not something that magically comes about with the public pronouncement of vows. Marriage, at the least in the operative model in the Western world, is a relationship that grows from first meeting through various stages of friendship and intimacy, into different levels of commitment, through the trial and error of building a working relationship, into the complex reality of sharing the same home, resources, limitations and

opportunities, along with the possible arrival and presence of children, into a maturity of years and growth of their own offspring, past the thresholds and crises of partnership, parenthood, and, for a steadily increasing portion of the population, into the beginning of yet another form of commitment that can span several decades into old age and a completely different kind of relationship.

(Grey & Stelling 2001:194)

Thatcher (1999:111) also emphasizes that marriage is a process, rather than a clearly defined rite of passage. Thatcher (2002) suggests that engagement formally becomes part of the process of marriage. In this way, a couple could promise faithfulness to each other and enter the first phase of marriage, with the prospects of a wedding ceremony to make it official. In the case of cohabitation, the state should be responsible for the regulation of jurisdiction to protect the rights of both parties. The Church has the responsibility to guide the couple pastorally to understand that living together is a phase towards a possible permanent marriage before God. Sex becomes part of the later more intimate phase and every couple should decide for themselves when they are ready to enter this phase. Mutual commitment is essential for the couple's intimacy, both sexual and spiritual, to grow stronger (Dreyer & Van Aarde 2007b:678).

7.1.3 Where is the line?

"An 'anything goes' perception does not benefit a social constructionist narrative understanding of life and identity" (Müller & Pienaar 2003:141). Social constructionism acknowledges that the "individual and society needs boundaries. Without boundaries individuals become chaotic personalities and end up totally dysfunctional. The same happens to organizations, communities and society" (Nel 1998:395). However, boundaries need to be open to renegotiation according to changing contexts over time. There could never be something like... "open the Book and recite the appropriate universally applicable answer to sexuality." (Gerkin 1991:12)

Although a lot has changed over the years, an attitude of anything goes cannot be accepted. The Bible might not be clear on all the finer ethical questions man came up with over the years, but certain morals can't be taken for granted.

One of the clearest guidelines concerning sexual ethics is found in 1 Cor 6:18 "Avoid immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body." Paul also says "... because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband." (Cor 7:1-2)

This is clear guidelines even in the twenty-first century. Multiple sexual partners with an attitude of anything goes is wrong and in the end some-one always gets hurt. God gave sex as a personal gift between two people. Although the customs surrounding marriage and relationships have changed, the sexual part should stay the same.

So how do you know if a relationship is serious enough for the next big step? If a relationship reaches a point where it's not about one self but about the other person, when the other person is first and the self second, that relationship could be ready to become a sexual relationship.

7.2 Guidelines

According to Peter Vardy (1997:171) there are four guiding principles that could guide us when it comes to sexual ethics.

1. Sexuality is an essential part of human nature and is directly related to the experiences that an individual had as a child. These experiences determine whether a person is capable of giving and receiving love and the ability to be part of a sensible sexual relationship.
2. When approaching sexual ethics the person in his/her totality should be taken into account.

3. Sexual activities should never be forced; it is a gift of intimacy, commitment and trust from one individual to another. The pleasure that come with sex is a bonus and not the purpose itself.
4. To make love should be a deep mysterious experience between two individuals. When focused on the mechanical part of sex and ignoring the context of the relationship where it takes place in, the true meaning of sex gets lost.

Vardy (1997:171)

Love, permanence and trust are the most important values of sexual ethics. Through these values the development of life-long relationships are improved (Haspel 2007:273).

The New Testament does not ignore sexuality. It is part of being human and an essential part of a person's identity. Christ brought liberation from legalism, but this freedom should be accompanied by responsibility. Sexuality and morality are therefore connected to each other. Sexually deviant behaviour is unacceptable; this kind of behaviour is against respect, caring and love for the other person. A person should never be treated without respect and be loved for self-pleasure. Any relationship that is not focused on the other person's needs, can never be justified by the New Testament. Sexuality and love should not be separated. That doesn't mean that love will not sometimes hurt, but within a loving relationship forgiveness is possible, because "love conquers all." During sex between two individuals a fusion and transfer of the two identities occur. The two give themselves with love and in total devotion to each other. Christian believers' identity isn't based on their sex, but is based in Christ. The wall that once separated them is broken down, they are now equal. Sexuality achieves its fullest expression in the presence of God Himself (Haspel 2007:273).

With all that's been said, what then would be appropriate guidelines for the twenty-first century? There could never be a one sentence rule that could sum up sexual and marital ethics. If there was, the sentence would most definitely come down to

LOVE, as love is the universal 'rule' for any relationship, especially a sexual relationship. In addition, let's focus on great statements that speak for themselves:

Christians also do it – but under a guise.

Christians also do it – but with responsibility.

Christians also do it – but with the passion of Godly love.

Christians also do it – but with total admission.

Christians also do it – but as equals.

Christians also do it – but in their own way.

(Steyn, 2007:138-148)

2 Timothy 2:22 “Avoid the passions of youth, and strive for righteousness, faith, love, and peace, together with those who with a pure heart call out to the Lord for help.”

“Contrary to contemporary culture we shall find that the answer is not in terms of 'what sex can do for me', nor even of what sex can do for a sexual partner or for a couple; rather, sex is to be used in the service of God. Only when sex is understood in this context of wider service will sexual ethics make transcendent sense” (Ash 2003:16).

“Genuine love is single minded – indeed that is its power. Genuine love always feels: it is with this particular person that I wish to live alone and for always” (Emil Brunner).

Guidelines for the twenty-first century according to Steyn (2006:152-153) includes the following;

- Christ freed us from legalism. But this freedom should be expressed with responsibility. Sexuality and morality is therefore closely related to each other.
- Sexual behaviour is unacceptable which goes against respect, caring and love for the other.
- Sexuality and love could never be separated.
- When two people are intimate, their identities unite and blend. They give themselves to each other as Christ gave Himself to us.

- Christian believer's identity isn't based on their gender but is centred in Christ. Men and women in Christ are equal.
- Sexuality matures in the presence of God. "May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being – spirit, soul and body – free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Steyn 2006:152-153)

7.3 Conclusions

In post-modern society the church has no choice but to review its traditional position on marriage. This can only happen if the church is prepared to acknowledge that traditional views were influenced by different cultural contexts through the ages. Reflection should take place within the current post-modern context.

Marriage as it is understood today has come a long way since Biblical times. Each generation has moulded the marriage concept to make sense to them within their own cultural context. Is it fair to say that the Bible doesn't provide enough guidelines on the subjects of marriage and sex; therefore each generation revised the few rules there are to suit them? The fact that morality is changing is undeniable. We will have to make a responsible distinction between cultural customs and religious values, for our culture will be ever changing and customs that were once acceptable are no longer acceptable today.

Living together or pre-marital sex shouldn't be seen as wrong or sinful, provided it is part of a marriage process. Cohabiting and sex before marriage could only be acceptable when a couple have mutual respect and love for each other and a future expectation from each other. Living together and sex could become part of the process which eventually leads to a public declaration before people and God of their love and commitment towards each other in the form of a marriage covenant.

Certain things could only be understood by those who believe in them, for instance saying that marriage is instituted by God would only be true for Christians who believe in God and creation. For disbelievers it would be irrelevant, because to them there would be no proof for such a statement.

It is clear that marriage as understood today is not the same concept as it was in Biblical times. A new set of rules/norms/guidelines are needed for the ultra-modern society. In my opinion guidelines are needed, and wanted. Most important, these guidelines should be applicable to the twenty-first century without lowering God's bar of what is right and wrong. Christians may never become equal to the world or attempt to justify what the Bible clearly portrays as sin.

This research makes it clear that we should stop shaming sex and educate people, especially adolescents about the value and power of one's sexuality. Young people need help to understand their own sexuality, advice on how to deal with their own sexuality as well as others, and should be warned against the dangers of sex. Young, old, married or un-married need guidance on sexual related questions and most important, guidelines that are Biblically grounded.

At the end of my research I have come to realize that the Bible does give mixed signals. On the one hand the Bible confirms the more conservative message that God's ideal for sex is to be enjoyed within a marriage. On the other hand I believe that it is no coincidence that a text such as Song of Songs is to be found in the Bible. Perhaps the purpose is to teach us what is more important; love, respect, faithfulness, and commitment or an institution called marriage.

The purpose of this research is not to disrespect marriage as institution or preach anti-marriage; I still firmly believe that the best place for sex is within a marriage. But that doesn't mean it should be the only place, nullify all other options. We should rather attempt to keep what is good about marriage as we know it and find reasonable solutions for our complex society to accommodate the wider spectrum Christians without the guilt feeling we all know so well.

Does this mean I agree to immature young people having free sex with an “anything goes” attitude? Absolutely not! If free sex implies careless, irresponsible, immoral sex it cannot be associated with the kind of sexual relationship Song of Songs portrays. Sex in Song of Songs may be before marriage but is everything but immoral. Moral sex is characterized by love, faithfulness, commitment, and equal respect. Where these virtues are not present, even if it is in a legal marriage, sex would be immoral.

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