

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY OF COUPLES IN OBSERVANCE OF MARITAL VOWS

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Abstract

This study assesses the spirituality of couples as it affects the observance of marriage vows by couples in Oyo West Baptist Conference churches. It also assesses the level of observance of five contents of marriage vows: love, faithfulness, togetherness, relationship and interpersonal issues. The population for the study was all couples in Oyo West Baptist Conference churches, and the sample consisted of 511 married men and women drawn from fifty [50] churches within and around Oyo, Ibadan and Ibarapa towns and villages. Each respondent assessed his or her spouse. Questionnaire was used to assess the degree of couples' observance of marital vows and also to give some actions of their spouses that expressed the assessed issues. It was found that the higher the spiritual level of the spouses, the higher their level of observance, conversely, the lower the spirituality, the lower the degree of observance, showing that spirituality is a factor in observance of marital vows. Based on these findings the researcher recommends that youth programmes be reviewed and directed more towards teaching them the importance of keeping vows.

Introduction

Studies by Odetola, Oloruntimilehin and Aweda (1983) on stability of marriage in Africa have shown that divorce has been frequent in some parts of Africa like

Stanleyville in Zaire, Broken Hill in Zambia and in Ghana among the Tallensi. The reasons for this rate of divorce have been found by Akande (2004) to be connected to level of marriage responsibilities, income of the couples and their location.

Oyelade (2012) has also found divorce rate to be connected to one form of violence or the other among couples. In Nigeria, it has also been observed that stability of marriage is a factor of religion, among others (Olusanya, 1983). Some other factors that have been found to be of importance in marriage stability are employment and economic level of the couple, educational level of the couple, their level of spirituality, the marriage cycle, sex in marriage, temperament, parental influence, child-bearing, location of the couple and so on (Heward Mills, 2005). Actually, in Yoruba cultural setting, the gender of a child plays a significant role in stability of marriage (Fayemi, 2012). Yet these couples are married either in the church or in the court registries and they took marriage vows. Marriage vows are taken by those who are married in the churches and those who are married in the court registries in order to protect their marriage, cement their love and bind their commitment to one another.

In the light of this incessant threat to marriage today, there is need for a study on the observance or non-observance of marriage vows as it affects stability of families. Observations have shown that institution of marriage vows is meant to be safety valve for marriage stability or a means of keeping intact the marriage. Yet there have not been studies on what helps observance or non-observance of these vows especially among Christians in the South Western Nigeria. Hence, the

desire of this researcher to study the extent that spirituality affects couples' observance of different aspects of marriage vows among other factors.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the theory of spirituality. Spirituality according to Houston (1984) is the state of deep relationship to God. In the past, expressions such as "holiness, holy living, godliness, walking with God and discipleship" seemed more acceptable because they emphasized a formal commitment, a deepening relationship with Christ and a life of personal obedience to the word of God. Houston developed the theory of Christian spirituality along six concepts. First, Christian spirituality is not as much of asceticism based on contempt for the material world but he says spirituality has the nature of biblical revelation of God

Second, it is Christocentric. Third it is the life in the Trinity. It is the outworking of the grace of God in the soul of man beginning from conversion to conclusion in death. Fourth, It is marked by growth and maturity in Christ-likeness. Fifth, It implies community and fellowship (Eph. 4:15-16), a life of prayer (Matt. 6:5-15), a sense of the eternal dimension in all one's existence and an intense awareness of life lived in the presence of God. Houston sees the spirit-filled life as one that manifests practically the Spirit of Jesus, with the fruit of love that is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled (Gal 5:22-23). And sixth, Christian spirituality engenders fellowship, and the communion of saints deepens its character. As social beings, the reality of our spirituality is tested by the quality of our public worship which inspires and embodies the love of God in human hearts.

Indeed, according to Hingley (1995), the term spirituality in Christian sense is best used to mean "living as a Christian." It describes the whole of the lives of those who have responded to God's gracious calls to live in fellowship with him. Spirituality according to Hingley includes the life of the whole person. It is a response to God. It is a life of dependence on God and being "led by the Spirit" [Rome 8:14]. In essence, spirituality connotes fellowship with God (e.g. prayer, fasting, and retreat); fellowship with man (congregational worship joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled); life lived in the spirit (growth and maturity in Christ likeness). Hence, this study views how Christian marriage and observance of the marital vow is affected by the level of Christian spirituality

Christian Concept of Marriage Vows

Family formations through marriage, according to Ogundare (2010) are of different types among the Yoruba. There are the Christian marriages, customary marriages, Muslim marriages and ordinance marriages. These four types end up with either monogamous or polygamous marriages. The Christian and ordinance marriages approve one man and one wife (monogamy) while Muslim and customary approve one man and many wives (polygyny).

There is an understanding that a Christian marriage has both benefits and burdens or prospects and problems; marriage has both moral obligations or duties, and legal rights and duties. Each married partner is responsible and accountable to the other partner (Dzurgba, 2007). Bringing this into the context of marriage being a symbol of Christ's relationship with his church as it is established in Ephesians chapter 5, Verses 23-33, the book of Ephesians presents Christ being

the Groom and the church His bride. The couples physical appearances, intellectual growth, emotional stabilization, harmonization of interests, unifying perception controlling desires, instilling discipline and sustaining unity are learnt through intimate interaction, dialogue and negotiation between the husband and wife. Dzurgba (2007) asserts that the man and woman constitute the primary society. In the context of this complete, exclusive intimacy between the husband and the wife, Paul tells Christians that "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Ephesians 5:3). In view of "the two becoming one flesh," he wrote that the relationship between husband and wife excludes parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and friends on both sides; they are assistant referees who must remain on the edges of the field to provide minor services to check certain fouls. The referee of the married life is God Himself ably represented by the Holy Spirit and Holy Bible. In this context, even priests are part of assistant referees.

Paul describes the "one flesh" relationship of the couple as a "mystery". This mysterious union of "one flesh" is difficult to understand or explain because its essence and meaning are beyond human understanding and explanation. The marriage is a combination of two bodies, souls or spirits, minds, hearts, sets of emotions and sexual organs. Christian marriage vows from religious perspectives established that the husband and the wife live their lives together till death do them part, while African culture do not understand the permanent nature of the commitment to marriage, neither do they admit the commitment to fidelity or exclusiveness. The requirement of a legal marriage is monogamy which can be dissolved at the appropriate court of law. The theological reflections on marriage vows are that they are covenants that are binding, that should be characterized

by faithfulness and constancy; and that which seals the Commitment to oneness/togetherness, love, comfort, honour, faithfulness and permanence in marriage. The general meaning of marriage especially in the context of Nigerian Baptist Convention Churches is that it is an exclusively heterosexual covenantal union between one man and one woman. The Christian concept of marriage vows is that marital vows are promises made between husband and wife at marriage and a commitment which announces an intention to attempt a permanent union. Contents of Christian marriage vows and the very important part of the vow is the issue of "for better for Worse.

The biblical basis for marital vows is that God ordained that a man and a woman come together and become one flesh. This involves personal commitment or troth, authorization by the family and/or society cohabitation, consummation, caring love, exclusive monogamy and spiritual harmony. Some variables that have been found to have significant influence on marriage and marriage vows are couples' employment and economic level, the marital cycle or age of marriage, gender, childbearing in marriage as well as temperament and sexual relationship of the couple.

Thesis of the Study

Studies have many factors accounting for marriage stability or instability. On marriage stability, such factors include physical and emotional compatibility, economy of the two parties, closeness in educational levels and spiritual levels of the two parties in marriage (Olusanya, 1983). One of the safety valves that have also been put in place for stability of marriage institution is marriage vows. However, there has not been much study on the level of spirituality of the couple

with respect to excellence in observance of these marriage vows, particularly among Christian couples in South Western Nigeria.

The major task of this study therefore is to see the interface between the spirituality of couples and their observance of marital vows. The general purpose of this study is to assess the spiritual level of couples in Oyo West Baptist Conference as it affects their observance of the marriage vows. Specifically, this study seeks to assess the level of observance of the content of marriage vows in the areas of love, faithfulness, relationship, togetherness and interpersonal issues, and differences that may exist, if any, based on level of spirituality of couples.

The pertinent questions that this study is out to answer are:

1. Is there any significant difference in the observance of marriage vows among couples with high, medium and low spiritual levels?
2. What content of marriage vow is observed more according to the spiritual level of couples?

A study of this kind would promote the well-being of the church and then the society at large as information by this study can be used by pastors, counselors, seminary lecturers, in seminars, workshops and sermons for the benefit of homes. Knowing fully well that healthy families make a healthy church and healthy churches make a healthy society hence, a healthy nation. In essence, as Ogundare (2010) also affirms, the well-being of the society depends on the well-being of families that make up the society and the products of such families. These are dependent on the stability of such families which could also be dependent on the

observance of the marital vows by couples, especially Christian couples. This goes a long way in determining the success of the pastor, indirectly determining the success of the theological training which the pastor has received.

Method

The contextual scope of this study is the assessment of different contents of marriage vows that Baptist Churches in Oyo West Baptist Conference use at wedding service. The population for the study was all couples with church and court marriage in Oyo West Baptist Conference churches. The Conference has 25 associations with about 323 churches of various sizes and membership. Oyo West Baptist Conference covers churches within Ibadan, Oyo and Ibarapa towns and villages around them.

The sample for the study was 50 churches covering 13 associations within the Conference purposively randomly churches sampled to include churches within the rural and urban areas, and churches of various sizes, namely: small, medium and large sizes. Couples from these sampled churches were also purposively sampled to cut across couples that were wedded in church and court registry. The sampling of participants was also done in proportion to the sizes of the churches. In other words, two married men and three women (or vice versa) were sampled from churches with 250 and below membership, five married men and married women were sampled from churches with 251-500 memberships, seven married men and eight married women or vice versa were sampled from the churches with 501-750 membership, ten men and ten married women from churches with 751 and above membership. The total sample was 510 married men and women.

The instrument for the study is a questionnaire designed by the researcher. It has three sections, section A demands general information about the respondents whereby items 13 and 14

demand that each respondent rate his or her own spiritual life and that of the spouse on the scale of high, average or low. Part of section B also tests their level of spirituality. It has four items that assess their love for church programmes; time spent on prayers; time spent on bible study and meditations; and their cravings for fasting, retreats and other spiritual exercises. These were also rated on the scale of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 as very high - 5, high - 4, average - 3, low -2 and very low - 1. Section C elicited information on other things that aid non-observance of marital vows. Cronbach Alpha on reliability is 0.8865.

Findings

Difference in the Observance of Marriage Vows among Couples Based on Spiritual Levels

Findings from descriptive statistics show that generally, the higher the spouses level of spirituality, the higher their level of observance. The same pattern was observed in the observance or item by item contents of vows studied. Table 1 presents this.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Observance of Marriage Vows Based on Spiritual Level

Contents of Marriage Vows	Spiritual Level	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Love	High	202	17.74	4.817
	Average	279	16.57	4.876
	Low	29	14.17	5.726
	Total	510	16.16	5.14
Faithfulness	High	202	21.09	3.584
	Average	279	16.54	4.01
	Low	29	17.03	44.162
	Total	510	18.22	3.92
Togetherness	High	202	21.76	3.182
	Average	279	20.46	4.193
	Low	29	16.97	5.308
	Total	510	19.73	4.23
Relationship	High	202	18.08	3.962
	Average	279	17.76	4.393
	Low	29	14.59	5.925
	Total	510	16.81	4.76
Interpersonal	High	202	21.77	3.497
	Average	279	20.07	4.329
	Low	29	16.10	6.667
	Total	510	19.31	4.83

On marital vows relating to love, couples with high level of spirituality performed slightly higher than those with average level of spirituality. Similarly, couples with average level performed higher than those with low level of spirituality. But on faithfulness, couples with low level performed higher than average level. In all other contents, couples with high level of spirituality topped the other two groups.

What content of marriage vow is observed most according to the spiritual level of couples? Among the five contents of marriage vows tested, observance is highest for all the three categories of level of spirituality in togetherness vows followed by interpersonal vows and faithfulness vows come third. Observance of relationship vows and love vows come fourth and fifth respectively and somehow low as shown also in table 1.

Table 2: ANOVA of Observance of Marriage Vows Based on Spiritual Level

Contents of Marriage Vows		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Love	Between Groups	388.904	2	194.452	8.087	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	2190.996		24.045		
	Total	2579.900				
Faithfulness	Between Groups	556.396	2	278.198	18.693	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	7545.533		14.883		
	Total	8101.929				
Togetherness	Between Groups	645.682	2	322.841	21.227	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	7710.836		15.209		
	Total	8356.518				
Relationship	Between Groups	311.314	2	155.657	8.305	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	9502.154		18.742		
	Total	9813.469				
Interpersonal	Between Groups	936.914	2	468.457	26.649	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	8912.460		17.579		
	Total	9849.35				
Total	Between Groups	3218.641	2	6609.32	29.031	0.000 (S)
	Within Groups	115424.4		227.662		
	Total	128643.0				

Table 2 also did a comparative study of observance of marriage vows between and within the three different levels of spiritual attainment of the subjects (i.e. high, average, and low) content by content. It was found that there are significant differences in the observance of love, togetherness, faithfulness, relationship and interpersonal issues based on spiritual differences.

A pair-wise comparison of spiritual levels according to contents of the marital vows was carried out to show where the differences lie, and the result is seen in table 3.

Table 3: Pair-wise Comparison of Spiritual Levels According Contents of Marriage Vows

Content of Marriage	Spiritual (I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Significance
Love	High	Average	1.17* 3.57*	0.4530.974	0.0370.001
		Low			
	Average	High	-1.17* 2.40*	0.4530.957	0.0370.044
Low					
Faithfulness	High	Average	1.56* 4.06*	0.3560.766	0.0000.000
		Low			
	Average	High	- 1.56* 2.50*	0.3560.753	0.0000.004
Low					
Togetherness	High	Average	1.30* 4.80*	0.3600.774	0.0020.000
		Low			
	Average	High	- 1.30* 3.49*	0.3600.761	0.0020.000
Low					
Relationship	High	Average	0.32 3.49*	0.4000.860	0.7320.000
		Low			
	Average	High	-0.32 3.18*	0.4000.845	0.7320.001
Low					
Interpersonal Issues	High	Average	1.17* 5.66*	0.3870.833	0.0000.000
		Low			
	Average	High	- 1.70* 3.96*	0.3870.818	0.0000.000
Low					
Total	High	Average	6.04*21.58*	1.3942.996	0.0000.000
		Low			
	Average	High	- 6.04*15.54*	1.3942.944	0.0000.000
Low					
	High	Average	-21.58*- 15.54*	2.9962.944	0.0000.000
		Low			
	Average	High			

Where the mean difference carries asterisk, it shows the difference between the

pairs is significant. This shows there is significant difference in the observance of love, faithfulness, togetherness, relationship, interpersonal issues and even overall by spiritual. The pattern is that the higher the level of spirituality, the higher their degree of observance and conversely, the lower the spirituality the lower their observance. The only difference is observed between the highly spiritual and averagely spiritual couples on relationship vows as it is revealed that there is no significant difference at the rate of their observance. Overall, it could be said that spirituality is a factor in observance of marriage vows as low spirituality has corresponding low observance while high and average spirituality has high and average corresponding observance respectively. This may be in agreement with Song (1995) saying that "for Christians, the setting of human promising is fixed by biblical understanding of a steadfast God whose righteousness is expressed in his faithfulness to his promises. This understanding about God and how he holds His promises must have been inculcated in the Christians. The deeper they are in Christian life, the greater their understanding about marriage and its covenantal nature, having understood the nature of God Himself who is a covenant keeping God even when sometimes the human counterpart in the covenant with God does not keep his own part of the covenant. Little wonder, the bible says "as a man is, so shall his son be." Thus, according to Dzurgba (2007) children of God who are grounded in him would remember that they swore to "for better for worse" and this can keep the two to practically and faithfully keep to the vows without nursing the idea of divorce, marital troubles notwithstanding.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was found that the higher the level of spirituality of the spouse, the higher their level of observance, and conversely, the lower the level of spirituality, the lower the degree of observance, even across all the contents of vows that are tested - love, faithfulness, togetherness, relationships and interpersonal issues. This is a pointer that God is a major force that can help couples to enjoy marriage to the fullest. In other words, the more one releases oneself to God, the more God is able to help one in marital relationships, especially building suitable and lasting relationships. Hence, the researcher recommends that youth programmes (GA, Lydia, RA and students' fellowship) be reviewed and directed more towards building them up in Christian spirituality and teaching them the importance of keeping vows right from their youth, so that when they are married it would not be difficult to keep marriage vows. Also, the paper recommends that Christian women take it upon themselves to model the girls and watch them as they grow up spiritually. By this, they would be able to have impact on them as they make decisions about marriage. The findings have also suggested the need to develop pamphlets and manuals for training in Christian spirituality and observance of marital vows.

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