

***Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21 and Its Implication for the Christian Family in Nigeria**

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This paper is a text research designed to demonstrate that the family as a significant unit of the society has progressively been under threat in contemporary society. This is as much global as it is local. It is equally so across religious and other lines. It is increasingly becoming a concern among Nigerians Christians in particular. The paper reveals that the biblical concept of the *Shema* has potential to serve as a corrective to the decay and threatening bastardization of the family life among Nigerian Christians.

Key words: Christian marriage, monotheism, Old Testament, the torah, man's relationship with God.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is God's idea from the beginning. God intended that through marriage, there would be family. He made family to be an environment where children could be nurtured by both parents. From the Garden of Eden experience, it is evident that God's plan for man is to be ethically and morally perfect. The mandate given to man is to oversee and maintain the creation of God in perfect order. In carrying out his given mandate, man is expected to reference God in being faithful to Him and His creatures. For man not to deviate from his responsibility, God gave him the Torah which contains the moral and civil laws. These laws are to guide the lifestyle of the people of God.

The world today is facing another direction. Considering Africa, with a particular reference to Nigeria, it is evident that man has neglected his purpose. Christian couples like others in the society are filling divorce notice on daily basis. The Nigerian streets, campuses and even Churches are lined with ladies who have betrayed womanhood with their indecent dresses. Young men that should have been giants for Jesus are now in armed robbery business. Fornication and even adultery are no longer limited to the pews but now flowing from the Church alters to the pews. Materialism, craving for fame and positions has almost swallowed godliness and godly characters in a society as religious as Nigeria. Almost every living room has turned to a Church. Streets are filled with Churches and mosques, yet, little impact is

felt and corruption increases uncontrollably. Pastors who are assumed to be the mouthpiece of God and serve as model for others are also having marital challenges. Some pastor's children are getting involved in several malevolent vices. This author adopts devotional approach since the paper mainly addressed Christian families. As suggested by the topic, the study will focus mainly on using the *Shema* as a veritable instrument to call Christian families back to the ideal foundation (Mal. 2: 15). The *Shema* will be examined as a concept wherein the root meaning of the word and several authors' interpretations will be considered. Since the *Shema* is given to the people who were in covenant relationship with God, this work focuses mainly on Christian families. There is therefore, an aspect of this work that flips over the concept of marriage, some of the challenges facing Christian families, their effect on the Church and society and the spirit of the *Shema* will be used as pastoral care necessary to correct those challenges. The significance of this work is majorly to call Christian families back to God in their personal and interpersonal relationships and also to call their attention to the need to train their children to love God.

Concept Of The *Shema*

According to Austel (1980), the Hebrew word transliterated as *Shema* originated from the root word

meaning “*He heard.*” It means “*to hear, to listen, to obey*” in its complete sense. The verb is used 1,050 times in the Qal, Niphal (simple passive tense) in the Bible. The cognates are found in Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic, Ugaritic, and Ethiopic languages. The basic idea is that of a message or merely a sound. Synonyms are: give attention, be attentive, give ear, a denominative from “*ear,*” hence, “*use the ear.*” *Shema* has the basic meaning “*to hear.*” This is extended in various ways, generally involving an effective hearing or listening. As observed by Luciano and Chianeque (2006), at the heart of Israel’s confession of faith was the belief that Yahweh was not one of the pantheon gods, but unique God. Yahweh was to be the sole object of Israel’s faith and obedience. This doctrine does not contradict the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, for Trinity is regarded as fundamentally united in the Godhead. This command insists that obedience to the law of God involves more than just conforming to an external system of rules, it also involves the attitudes of the hearts and mind (Deut.6:6).

If the Israelites as well as Christians truly love God, they will also pass His commandments on to their children, so that this attitude of love will pass on from age to age (Deut. 6:7). Luciano and Chianeque (2006) noted that the instruction to tie God’s law on their hands and bind it to their foreheads originally was a metaphor for how these laws were to be present in every aspect of their lives (Deut. 6:8). This command was later taken literally and Jews took to wearing phylacteries. Moses intensely reminded the Israelites that they were God’s covenant people. He pointed out that God’s law to them was fundamental to a life acceptable to God. Genuine love for God will issue in a life of obedience, which will sustain them as God’s holy people in the midst of pagan environment (Schultz and Smith, 2001).

“*Hear you...*” is the first Hebrew word of the classical Jewish declaration of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which reads literally, “*Hear you, Israel, the LORD your God, the Lord is one.*” The last letters of the first and last words of this verse are written in Hebrew Bible in oversized script, thereby forming the Hebrew word “*witness*” to indicate that by this verse Jews testify to the oneness and uniqueness of God. It connotes a difference in both quantity and quality from polytheism (Unterman 1985). By the second century AD., the *Shema* prayer has consisted of Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41. Added to it is a special benediction to be recited every morning and evening (based upon Deut 6:7). The first section includes the two-fold command to love Yahweh completely and to express this by perpetually calling to mind and inculcating His commandments. The addition of Deuteronomy 11:13-21 serves to place this demand for obedience within the framework of blessing for its fulfilment and curse for its neglect. Numbers 15:37-41 contains an addition to the Phylacteries of the first two sections. Also added was “the

Tassels” which are also to aid in remembering the law, and concludes the whole with a statement derived from the introduction to the Decalogue (Deut 6:41; Exo.20:2; Deut 5:6) the phrase probably originated during the time of Josiah and it consists of six Hebrew words (Wharton 1962). The dispute about which of the more than six hundred commandments of the Law was most important is a characteristic of the first century rabbinical discussions. It was in this context that the subtle question about the “great commandment” was put to Jesus. He answered with indisputable *Shema* and combined it with Leviticus 19:18 “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Wharton 1962). Lazerson (2012) noted that the *Shema* requires special concentration on the meaning of the words of the first two verses (vers 4-5). So, many Jews cover their eyes to achieve such concentration.

Having considered the authors’ mind on this subject of discussion, it is of paramount importance to do the expository study of the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9. This is to deduct some inferences from it which will be used as instrument to counsel Christian couples on the need to allow them to put God in His rightful place in order to have a godly society.

“*Shema*” in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 And 11:13-21

There are three main points emphasized in the first passage these include the concept of monotheism (Deut. 6:4), command to have whole hearted love for Yahweh (Deut. 6:5), and command to learn the Torah and pass it to the children (Deut.6:6-9). In order to do proper justice to the above text, these three points will be analyzed.

The Idea of Monotheism

Monotheism is the belief in only one God. It comes from two Greek words: *Monos* meaning ‘alone,’ ‘single,’ ‘one’ and *Theos* meaning ‘God.’ According to Bushwell (1980), this view asserts that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit but yet one God. In the Old Testament, the classic expression of the doctrine of one God is found in Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel....” Many other Old Testament verses affirm strict monotheism e.g. the Ten Commandments begin with “Thou shall have no other gods... (Exo. 20:3, Deut 5:7). God emphasized this command by stating that He is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5). In Deuteronomy 32:39, God said there is no other God with Him. He alone is God (Psalm 86:10) (Bernard 1997).

In line with the Old Testament concept of monotheism, the New Testament also teaches that there is but one God (Mk. 12:29-34). As noted by Wilson (1988), it is interesting to note that Deuteronomy 6:4 is an affirmation of monotheism in opposition to polytheistic environment. According to Wright (1953), the word ‘one’ is used in contradistinction to ‘many’ but it also implies uniqueness

and difference. Wharton (1962) explained that Yahweh is the only God who is eligible to be served by man. He is a being infinitely and eternally perfect, He is self-existent, and self sufficient. He is the one and only true God; He is holy God and He is one. The above interaction revealed that God is one in purpose and will and He is the only true God who refuses that His people should serve any other object or being besides Him. It is also noted evidently that the firm belief of this self-evident truth would effectually arm the Israelites and Christians against all idolatry. The above finding leads to the next sub-topic.

The Command to Love

The word love in this passage according to Wright (1953) is derived from the vocabulary of family life. It is in Deuteronomy that the word is first used comprehensively for the primary attitude which man should have toward God. Love of God involves holy fear and reverence and it expresses itself in that devoted and single minded faithfulness which issues in unreserved and dutiful service. The love of God without obedience is not love (Wright 1953). To teach the Israelites to fear God and in pursuance of His responsibility, Wharton (1962) observes that God here commands them to love Him. The warmer their affection, the greater will be their veneration for Him. All their duties to Him are expected to be performed from a principle of love. However, in the *Shema*, the Israelites are exhorted to love God with all their total personality in a vibrant, growing relationship. This love is a response to divine plan.

The Israelites were given a definite extent of loving God. This is found in verse 5 of the passage under consideration: "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Wright (1953) noted that "Heart" in Hebrew psychology is primarily the seat of the mind and will, together with a whole range of psychical emotions. Also, "soul" is the source of vitality which dies when the body does. Here, the two words mean that one is to love God with his whole being. This is reinforced by the third phrase, "with all your might," this can simply be interpreted to mean "with all one's force and strength." As noted by Simmons (2012), the Talmud explains that the word "heart" is metaphorically used for "desire." He analyzed this to mean that one should not use only good traits like "kindness and compassion" to do the will of God, but also to use one's more challenging traits to serve God. To "love with all your soul" is the supreme expression of human love for God by being willing to die for one's faith (Simmons, no date). Mathew (2003) interprets this to mean that their desire must be toward Him, it must be a constant pleasure to them to think of Him, speak to Him, and serve Him. They must love Him as the Lord, the best of beings, and as their God, a God in covenant with them. The heart must be carried out towards Him with a great candour and fervency of

affection. So, if they are to do anything with all their heart, it should be nothing else, but to love God (Mathew 2003).

According to Mathew (2003), Israelites were commanded to have superlative love for God. This means they should love Him above any creature whatsoever, and love nothing besides Him. What they love must be for Him and in subordinate to Him. So, their hearts must be united in this love and the whole stream of their affection run to Him (Mathew 2003). The Lord desires their loving as well as their reverent and obedient response, so that in times of drought or famine they may not turn to Canaan's fertility gods (Deut. 6:14) (Raymond 1993). God's promises should inspire their love because that love does not begin with these wilderness pilgrims about arriving the Promised Land, it reached back into their history. He was their father's God, true to His word, fulfilling what He promised them. If they therefore love Him with whole-hearted devotion, they are responding to the unchanging love of an unswerving God who had been true to their fore-fathers and would not disappoint them (Raymond 1993). Such an exceptional, munificent and trustworthy God deserves their total, not divided allegiance because He has deliberately chosen them as His elect people. Hence, the loving initiative is with Him, not the Israelites.

As noted by Wright (1953), the importance accorded the *Shema* is made clear in verses 6-9: The words are to be upon your heart. The following verbs are necessary to note: "You shall teach them diligently... talk of them constantly, bind them as a sign... write them." The simple understanding is that the love of God is to be the central and absorbing interest in life. Mathew (2003) submits that "Meditation" is the means for the maintaining and the keeping up of the love in their hearts and in their houses. It is the means by which the divine light and power are conveyed to the hearts. Their thoughts must be daily conversant with it and thereby the whole soul may be brought to abide and act under the influence and impression of the *Shema*. According to Raymond (1993), this love for God must be shared in the home so that the children and the grand children would learn and keep all His decrees and commands. Also, parents were to impress this law on their children's minds and make it the subject of natural everyday conversation within family life. Based on the above interaction, it is necessary to expatiate on learning the *Shema* and teaching the children.

The Command to Learn and Teach the *Shema*

In recent times, often due to circumstances beyond control, two-parent nurturing seems difficult. This is because in some homes, one parent may have abdicated the responsibility and walked out, leaving the remaining parent to cope as best possible. Weising (1989) noted that in many homes, today's economic conditions often

make it necessary for both parents to work, causing them to think more about survival than about nurturing their children. It is the parent's responsibility to teach their children right from wrong and to give them a value system. This aspect will discuss the importance of Christian couples teaching their children the word of God. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the need to learn the *Shema* and also teach the children is emphasized. According to Kaster (1962), the technical term for "instruction," "teaching" or "direction" in the Old Testament is the *Shema*. The modern Hebrew word for "education" is derived from the root "to train." This is found in the Old Testament at a late period in the imperative verbal form in Proverbs 22:6. "Train up a child in the way he should go." The root of the verb is *lmd* meaning "to learn" is found in Ugaritic and the root *lamadu* "learn" is found in Akkadian. Another verb root used in the later period is *ysr* in the sense of "to discipline, correct, admonish." Hence, it means "to instruct" (Kaster 1962). In this passage, great concern is shown to learning the law by meditating on it day and night and teaching the children the same.

As noted by Kaster (1962), the *Shema* orders each Israelite to teach the law assiduously to his children. This duty of transmitting the legacy received from one's father on to one's children was recognized as of prime significance. To receive the heritage and to pass it on to generations yet unborn was crystallized as an educational doctrine commanded by God. According to Matthew (2003), those that love the Lord should do what they can to engage the affections of their children to God and thereby preserve the entail of religion in their families from being cut off. The effect of this teaching lies on the fact that the more conversant people are with these teachings, the more they shall admire them and be affected with them, and so, become instrumental to communicate the divine light. According to Tidwell (1982), teaching is essential, not obligatory and where teaching of God's word is neglected, spiritual amnesia sets in. Parents therefore, play important role in this education process. Garrison and Magoon (1972) explain that learning takes place in proportion to the extent that the learner is actively directed toward a goal or the solution of a problem. Akande (1971) observed that many parents could not stay with their children because they hardly stay at home. Also, many parents over-indulge their children and many who are Christians do not teach their children to pray as they themselves do not pray.

Peter (1997) submitted that under favourable conditions if fathers and mothers are both developing the children, they are more likely to be empathetic than feeling animosity during the roughest parenting trials. Riley (1984) argued that rooted in the experiences of the early childhood are the values individuals will develop for themselves in later years. The early childhood experience also affects the capacity to live according to these values, and the individuals attitudes toward themselves and the

human community. The way children learn and grow points to what they will become. Max (1988) submits that a healthy self-concept develops as a child internalizes the parent's honesty and consistency. The child's sense of self develops through internalizing his relationship with parents and other significant adults. According to Kalejaiye (2006), the young ones today are the leaders of tomorrow who will also have to hand over to the generation after them. The demand that God's covenant be the subject of conversation at all times in the home, on the way, by night and day... as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is to be able to hand down the knowledge of the law of God as something precious from generation to generation (Eavey 1965). It is important to note here that the society starts from individual homes. It is therefore compulsory that parents must take it up to teach their children faithfulness and fidelity to God at home. It is compulsory that the young ones hear the law being taught at home, and see it lived out authentically so as to make the society godly.

Having the above understanding in mind, it is important to delve into the second segment of the *Shema* (Deut. 11:13-21) so as to be able to know the mind of God in rewarding those that obey it and also to know the punishment attached to its disobedience. It behoved the Israelites to obey God's commandments carefully so that His blessing might be with them and on their land. They will be blessed with sufficient rain to make their seed grow and increase their harvest. Alexander (2001) explains the seasons of rain in verse 14 thus: The first rain starts from the middle of October to the end of December. The latter rain is that which falls in March and April, about the time when the grapes are ripe and ready for harvest. Thompson (1974) explained that if Israel loved and served God with her heart and soul, God would grant her regular sequence of rains in their season. The autumn rains in October-November broke the summer drought and made ploughing possible. The spring rains in March-April were the last before the summer and brought a green coat to the whole land. The latter rain was indispensable for fruit trees and for setting the harvest. The farmers gathered in their grain, grapes and olives to provide food for the people. The rain also ensured pastures for the beasts and flocks. But if they allowed themselves to be deceived and misled so as to apostatize from the LORD and serve other gods or worship them, the divine displeasure would be shown to them in the withholding of God's blessings so that they would miserably perish. Verses 16 and 17 explain that if Israel attributed these blessings to other gods, such as Baal, Hadad, and Dagon, God would withdraw His blessings from them. This is because the action would be tantamount to breach of covenant and would result in the operation of the curses of the covenant which may be lack of rain, failure of the crops, and the destruction of life. Since obedience to God is fundamental to Israel's

well-being, verses 18-21 express the idea that the commandment of Moses needed to be laid up in the heart of the present generation and be carefully transmitted to the future generations. According to Thompson (1974), the divine promise sworn to the fathers would never fail for men who obeyed God. But conversely, Israel would lose her land if she proved unfaithful.

Shema was given as a guide for God's people so that they would come into marriage as God-fearing individuals. Their desire would be to have God-fearing homes where the children would be brought up in the way of the Lord and live for the Lord. With this motivation in mind, the next stage of this work will delve into the issue of marriage. The expectation is to examine the mind of God for Christian marriage, considering the role of each of the couples in making a godly home. Also, the challenges serving as barricade to the actualization of God plan for marriage will be considered.

Christian Marriage and Its Challenges

With postgraduate development in all fields of knowledge, man is yet to move out of crèche in the organization of his own home. Science has perfected the art of communication to the level of easy global communication when the art of communication in the home is almost fading off.

Marriage, according to Olthuis (1995) is a mutual exclusive, life-long, one-flesh union between a husband and wife. This relationship is characterized by fidelity, truth, trust, love and commitment. Marriage is the ultimate human connection in which two people commit themselves fully and truthfully to each other in a life-long journey of deep sharing, mutual respect and growing intimacy. God designed marriage to be serviceable for the beginning of families where godly children would be raised (Malachi 2:15). Christenson (1970) emphasized that marriage is the precious foundation and corner-stone of all society. According to Taylor (1974), the pre-eminence of the home in society and the character of the family relationship are obtainable in that a man and his wife must exist, serve and worship as one flesh.

Wynn (2005) submits that marriage in Christian doctrine fulfils God's plan of creation. The doctrine of Christian marriage is so built into existence that it provides a model for God's relation to humanity. The covenant is not only between husband and wife but also between that couple and God. This covenant is binding for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Francis (1995) submitted that the issue of parenthood cannot be left out while discussing issues that bothers on Christian couples' relationship. According to Francis, parenthood implies accepting responsibility for the physical and emotional nurture of a child given by God to bless His people. It is rooted on knowing that

needs would be met, and that the child is loved, valued and accepted which give the child confidence and interest in the parent (Francis 1995). Despite the entire good plan from God to mankind, there are a lot of challenges confronting marriage most especially among the Christian couples. Some of these challenges will be considered in the next stage of this work. Marriage in the Bible is viewed as something people should stick with and work to develop inspite of difficult times. It is obvious that there are a lot of challenges facing Christian couples which make some of them to fail in their responsibilities before God in loving God and teaching their children to do the same. Some of these challenges are hereby discussed:

The Place of God in Marriage: God has no place in some so called Christian marriages. This has a serious impact on how couples deal with stress (Collins 2007). Many Christian couples today are very active in the Church but their spiritual lives are worthless. How would such a couple that does not reverence God in their hearts be able to teach their children to do so?

Unfulfilled Expectations: As noted by Collins (2007), both the husband and the wife have learned about marriage from their parents or from their friends. This may lead each to develop routines and ways of doing things that are brought to the marriage and may come into sharp conflict with the other partner's lifestyle. In other words, many intending spouses have preconceived some qualities expected in their partner in marriage. If these seem lacking, it becomes a problem for them. When variations like these are uncared for, frustrations build and problems become more difficult to handle.

Unhealthy Relationships: Collins (2007) observed that when relationship in marriage becomes unhealthy, each couple begins to look at life independently of other and difficult goals and hopes begin to appear. There will be increased tendencies to be defensive, to criticize, and to engage in subtle manipulation. As defensive and self-centred attitudes develop, these create tension and push the husband and wife further apart. In a home like this, the children would begin to take sides and such a home is far from loving God.

Faulty Communication: According to Christenson (1970), this occurs when either or both couples have never learned to communicate clearly and efficiently. Communication involves the sending and receiving of messages. Messages are sent verbally and nonverbally. When the verbal and the nonverbal messages contradict, a double message is sent. When faulty communication is more common than clear communication, the marriage can develop serious problems.

Keeping Secrets: Collins (2007) noticed that revelation of secrets is painful, but revealing secrets can be very helpful in building relationships. For many couples, weaknesses and other secrets are raised in insensitive

ways so that the secrets bring problem rather than growth. Such home is built on an unhealthy foundation and would not enjoy the presence of God unless there are evident changes. This is because transparency is the sole ingredient that seasons the oneness expected in a godly husband and wife.

Disappointing Sex: A lack of accurate knowledge, the inability to perform adequately, inhibiting attitudes about sex, and differences in sex drive are part of the factors that can lead to sexual disappointment. Also, insufficient opportunities for privacy, unrealistic expectations are among the sexual challenges that can arise. As noted by Collins (2007), impatience, frigidity, impotence or the discovery of the partner's past sexual experiences can also hinder the intimacy that was anticipated. Others include busyness of lifestyle, insensitivity in one or both of the partners. When these problems are not resolved, marriages always suffer.

Domestic Violence: Doran (2005) observed that this is increased markedly by unemployment of the husband. It often leads to wife-beating, cursing, property destruction and so on. It is often associated with alcoholism or drug abuse. Also, when couples that have incompatible temperaments come together to be husband and wife, domestic violence will be evident. Also, some husbands and wives are careless in carrying out their responsibilities at home. Some keep late outings, some engage in extra-marital sexual acts and so on. The moment either of the couple engages in external means of deriving pleasures the probability of neglect of domestic rights and responsibility will be evident and there will be reactions. Such a home cannot please God and their children cannot also be trained to love God.

Social Challenges: The writer observed that the problem of civilization is making things worse among Christians today. Part of this is geographical separation of husband and wife because of job location. Also, the curiosity to get more money is another vital factor. Most times the children are either left to themselves or to the fate of a housemaid. Craving for material things and fame has taken over the place of God in many Christian homes.

Effects of Marital Challenges on the Church and Society

Several specific effects of marital challenges could be observed in the contemporary society. Some of these effects are discussed below:

Confusion, Despair and Hopelessness: As noted by Collins (2007), nearly every marriage goes through periods when the couple's original hope and enthusiasm for their relationship both fade at least temporarily. When this happens, their hope turns to sadness, hurt and anger. These would be transferred to the children, colleagues at work, neighbours and so on. Through this,

the Church and the society would share either directly or indirectly in the problem of the home.

Withdrawal: there are a lot of people who are legally married, living together and sometimes sleep on the same bed, but are emotionally and psychologically divorced. At the interior, in marriages like this the spouses have stopped being friends (Collins 2007). By withdrawing emotionally from each other, the partners avoid the pain of their disintegrated marriage and social disgrace of divorce.

Desertion: This is the most extreme form of withdrawal as noted by Collins (2007). When the marital pressures get too intense, some people simply leave. It is difficult to compile statistics on the incidence of desertion, but a lot of mates desert their spouses and families each year. Such people always leave behind hurt feelings, confusion, anger, uncertainty, financial pressures, and one-parent families.

Separation or Divorce: This is the termination of one's promising, hope-filled, and satisfying relationship that has been coming apart socially, spiritually, and emotionally. This is the worst evil in the society today because its effect on the youth is disheartening. Also, its rate in the society is alarming.

Single Parenting: The havoc of single parent problem in the Church and society cannot be underestimated. Besides the fact that the society is breeding young ones that are deficient in home training, sexual immorality among single fathers and mothers are causing more homes to bow to the pressure of divorce. More children who are victims of single parent are becoming frustrated with life. As observed by Ogunrinade (2008), single parent is one of the major root-cause of teenage pregnancies in Nigeria. Dopamu (2010) noted that despite the fact that Nigeria can be classified as a religious society, yet, the Nigerian youths are beset with despicable activities. According to him, this is the result of the failure of parents in their God-given parenthood responsibility. Also, Oderinde's (2009) observation on this subject is an eye opener. According to him, the examples set before the youths at home, in the Church and the society as a whole, are not such that can provide God-fearing, emotional stable and sensible youths. Because of inability of parents to make themselves a role model, youths have discovered hypocrisy all around them and label the value of their parents as synthetic and plastic. Nigeria has been labelled as corrupt, identified with fraud, crime, poverty and disease. As argued by Oghenechuko (2010), Nigeria needs more than change of image, she needs moral reform.

Illicit Sexual Relations: Another pandemic noticed both in the Church and in the society as a result of marital challenges is sexual scandal among Christian couples. Even more Church leaders are getting involved in this evil on daily basis. It has grown in the Church to the extent that most of the victims felt no shame or disgrace in

getting involved in it. This is having negative influence on Christian integrity and evangelism among the adherents of other religions.

Applying the Spirit of *the Shema* to Christian Families

According to Moynagh (1995), role models within the heavenly family, as echoed in the Church on earth can show families how to change. On this note, it is necessary to apply the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 and use it to encourage Christian families in their responsibility to God. This aspect will combine preventive measures and counselling of couples who are victims of ungodly homes using the spirit of *the Shema*. The following inferences from the exposition of the *Shema* can serve as a viable instrument for bringing Christian families back to their expected responsibility:

The monotheistic Concept Applied: God is one, and He wants the husband and wife to be one in purpose and focus. He established families through the coming together of a man and a woman that would live together as one flesh in a wholly and truthful commitment. They are expected to have a common understanding about God and also have a common reverence for Him. A couple with such mind set as this will be able to lead their children to do likewise as they set themselves as models for the children to emulate. In a home where such is found, trust will propel the home to meet up with set targets without stress and this will lead many unbelieving and frustrated couples who live around them to Christ as they would be seen by others as a model.

The Command to Love Applied: The Israelites were commanded to love the Lord “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Jesus in Mark 12:29-34 reinterpreted the concept of loving and divided it into two: loving the LORD with whole-hearted devotion and loving one’s neighbour as oneself. It would therefore, be extremely difficult for a family that does not love God with wholehearted devotion to love each other. To have superlative love for each other in a family demands a superlative love for God and this is expressed in a mutual exclusive loving, a one-flesh life pattern, service, and worship which is a relationship characterized by deep sharing, mutual respect, growing intimacy, truth, trust and whole-hearted commitment to each other. Such a couple would never involve in extra-marital sex, keeping secrets, nagging and so on. This is because their devotion to each other is the result of their unflinching devotion to God. To be able to give a total and not a divided allegiance to God, couples must be ready to give undivided allegiance to each other at home and must be able to extend this to their children.

The Command to Learn and Teach *the Shema* Applied: The state of affairs in Nigerian society today is a replica of the state of affairs in most Nigerian homes. In

homes where God is loved with a whole hearted devotion, couples in such homes put their best to engage the affection of their children to God. Most parents would never want their children to live the way they lived because they themselves are shame and disappointment to God due to the fact that they have in most times betrayed their knowledge and understanding of God. Since they themselves are not models to emulate, they find it difficult to put their children’s feet in the way of the Lord. The *Shema* therefore, demands that it is compulsory for the faithful parents to take it up and teach their children faithfulness and fidelity to God at home. The young ones must always hear the law being taught at home, and also see it lived out authentically so as to be able to make the society godly.

The Blessing Embedded in the Observance of the *Shema* Applied: The blessing promised is on their land. There would be sufficient rain for them to make their seed grow and increase their harvest. In other words, obedience to God is fundamental to human well-being. When the land is peaceful, the inhabitants would also live in peace. When the land yields its harvest, there won’t be famine, drought, diseases, disaster, calamity, or death. The Lord himself will be the light, shade and shelter for His obedient people and He would make their enemies to be their subjects. God would look on them with favour and make them fruitful and increase in number and He would also keep His covenant with them. This would be an evidence of His blessing on them and on their land (Leviticus 26:1-13; Deut. 28: 1-14).

Disobedience would lead to Withdrawal of God’s Blessings: Israelites and the rest of the world’s inability to keep God’s covenant is equivalent to breach of covenant. This as a result, would lead to the manifestation of the curses of the covenant which could be lack of rain, failure of crops, mal-feeding for man and flocks, diseases, unfulfilled aspirations, natural disasters and calamities, lack of safety or security, terrorism, and even death (Lev. 26: 14-46; Deut. 11:16-17; 28: 15-68).

Spirit of the *Shema* as a Guide to Counsel Victims of Ungodly Homes: Family enrichment and counselling aim as suggested by Clinebell (1989) can help Christian homes to improve. Also, the Church should develop a family ministry through its educational program. Intercessory prayer should be organized for those who are going through crises. Moreover, pastors need to be aware of those who require more counselling. Also, constant teaching and periodic preaching and emphasis on the importance of observing of the *Shema* among Christian families should be put in place. A lot of books have been published on the issue marriage and more Churches are bringing marriage related programs into their annual calendar of activities. Despite this, married couples still struggle, argue, separate, and even divorce. Abighe-Simon and Omo-Ikrodah (2001) submits that when people obey God, they will live under the shower of

His abundant blessings. But if they disobeyed Him, they will live under the shower of His unbroken curses. When all the above suggestions are put to use, it would help man to return to God's designed plans and programme. This will also help to reconcile the world back to God.

Conclusion

The author examined the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. It is discovered that the contemporary society is a replica of the contemporary homes. Christian homes as well as others are faced with challenges that are making man to live against his purpose for which he was created. The effect of this is that single parents are occupying more space within the Christian community and the effect of this on the Church and the society at large demands urgent attention. A vital point which every reader of this paper must note is that any life, home, community, nation, continent or world that lives against the law of God is already living under curse. The experience in the present day Nigeria is probably an evidence of the manifestation of the curse of God in Deuteronomy 11:13-21. The known time for rainfall is no longer stable, when rain suppose to start, there was no rain and when it rains, there is flood everywhere even in the far northern desert. No safety on the land, in the air and even on the sea. The land is no longer yielding maximally and a measure of beans grown in Nigeria is sold for more than four hundred naira. The fear of terrorism is everywhere even some Churches in the southwest are going for Oodua boys (traditional armed guards) as Church's guards. All these are the exact curses pronounced against Israelites if they would not keep the *Shema* or fail to pass it to their children. The Church at Ephesus refused the call of God to reject spiritual lukewarmness as they forsook their first love. But their refusal made God to remove their lamp stand from its place (Rev. 2:1-7) and the Ephesus of the Bible time is the contemporary Islamized Turkey. Christian families as God's covenant people in Nigeria are hereby called to return to God and cry unto the LORD for deliverance of the nation.

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