

...Set For the Defence of the Gospel. (Phil 1:17)

DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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T H E M E :

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN A CHANGING WORLD

DEFENDER OF TRUTH

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CONTENTS:

EDITORIAL

Pg 3

THE CHURCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

- Afolabi Akinyemi

Pg 3

MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF THE INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

- Lesley Egharevba

Pg 5

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE

- Jobalo Oshikanlu

Pg 7

CAN THE GOSPEL BE CHANGED TO MAKE IT MORE ATTRACTIVE

- Oladapo Olawale

Pg 10

POLITICS AND THE CHURCH

- Opemipo Olusola

Pg 12

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MORAL VICES

- Kayode Adekunle

Pg 14

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EDITORIAL

In this issue of Defender of Truth, we examine the subject of change and how it affects the Church of Christ. How to communicate more effectively using the internet, and reaction to moral, and doctrinal changes in the world are examined in detail.

We believe all our readers will be edified by the articles in this edition.

THE CHURCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

by *Afolabi A. Akinyemi*



The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines change as to make different in some particular; to make radically different; to give a different position, course, or direction to; to replace with another; to undergo a transformation, transition, or substitution, etc.

The word church refers to an assembly of people called out for a particular purpose; those called out from the world of sin into the kingdom of God; the body of Christ either local or universal. Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 1:1-2

Change has been referred to as the only constant thing in life. Truly living things and non-living things are always changing. Living things grow every day while non-living things are being moved around or altered one way or another. The environment and world we live in are also in a constant state of change. Governments are changing with people at the helm of affairs changing and systems of government also changing. The culture and language of people are evolving from time to time, and standards of morality, mode of dressing, ways of communication, and modes of transportation are constantly changing. This change may either be good or bad, positive or negative.

SOME AREAS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

1. Changes in Information and Communications Technology ICT, invention and use of the internet and social media.
2. Education- Teaching techniques, education system, etc.
3. Healthcare Changes – New ways of treating diseases, use of technology, etc.
4. Improvement of transportation systems
5. Scientific innovations, space travel, etc.

SOME AREAS OF NEGATIVE CHANGE

1. Religion – popular acceptance of atheism and evolution, rejection of bible inspiration, apathy towards religion, the proliferation of churches with varying doctrines, continued spread of Islam, etc. Atheism and the theory of evolution have become part of the school curriculum in most countries.
2. Morality – Attack on the institution of marriage; homosexuality and same-sex marriage, gender change, non-binary identification, cohabitation, abortion, mode of dressing, etc. Many countries have given legal backing to many of these changes and even made speaking out against these immoralities a crime.

3. Relativity – No absolute truth. Truth can be defined by whatever a person or society deems it to be.

The majority of people in the world are embracing these negative changes and the church is under pressure in these circumstances to change along with the world. We should remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”**. Matthew 7:13-14. The most populous way is not always the right way. The wise man Solomon also advised **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”**. Proverbs 14:12. The prophet Isaiah also says **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,**

Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts”. Isaiah 55:8-9. The thoughts of men do not determine what the truth is.

The Bible reveals to us that some things do not change.

1. God does not change. James 1:17
2. Jesus Christ does not change. Heb. 13:8
3. The Words of Christ do not change. Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31. His words are truth. John 17:17. Therefore, the truth does not change.

The Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was founded on these divine principles. The establishment, work, and organization of the church are all components of divine truth that do not change. This then means that the church in terms of organization, work, worship, and doctrine does not change. Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD REACT TO CHANGE

1. Use positive change in the world to enhance the cause of Christ and propagate the gospel etc. Use of the internet and social media to propagate the gospel, edify one another, and communicate. Churches of Christ in Nigeria have not adopted the use of the internet and social media in preaching the gospel and edifying members. There is a possibility of reaching millions of Nigerians through this medium. “As it currently stands, Nigeria has roughly 170 million mobile phone users based on

subscriptions. However, only 10 to 20 percent of the population uses smartphones while the rest rely on more traditional mobile phones, thus limiting their options to voice calls and text messages. Estimates from various sources suggest the number of smartphone users to be between 25 and 40 million. The data also suggests very strong growth over the next 4 years, which if estimates prove true, will be 140 million users by the time 2025 rolls around”.¹

2. Resist all negative changes and seek to bring proponents of those changes to the knowledge of the truth which does not change.



CONCLUSION

Change can either be good or bad. We must identify positive changes in the world that we can use to enhance the cause of Christ and tap into the opportunities that can be created by them. Failure to do this may result in being left behind which may affect our effectiveness in preaching the gospel.

On the other hand, the church must maintain its integrity in doctrine, organization, work, and worship in order to act as a light in the world. Matt 5:14-16; Rom. 12:1-2

¹[The growth of smartphone usage in Nigeria | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News Technology The Guardian Nigeria News Nigeria and World News](#)

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MAKING EFFECTIVE USE OF THE INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

by *Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba*



The Internet is one of the most important and wonderful technological advancements in the world today. It has made the world become a global village wherein communication is made easy regardless of distance. By definition, the Internet is a vast network that connects computers all over the world. Through this medium, people can share information and communicate from anywhere with an Internet connection. Social media on the other hand is a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Some examples of social media include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp Messenger, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, etc. People can engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications. Since people use social media to share information and stay in touch and interact with friends, family, and various communities, we can say that the major thing about the Internet and social media is about **communication** – whether orally or in written form.

Technically, the Internet (and social media in particular) cannot be said to be good or bad in itself – it depends on how it is used and what our attitude is toward it. But as with almost every other invention of man, the Internet and social media have advantages and even disadvantages. Many have used the Internet for fraudulent and unwholesome activities such as hacking into people's accounts, watching pornographic content and some will immerse themselves in social media to the point of excess and the detriment of their relationships, work responsibilities, and overall health, etc. Because of this and perhaps other reasons, many will avoid social media altogether, possibly even discouraging or condemning others for using it.

However, the Internet and social media can also be used positively for our good and the good of others. For example, that the Internet aids research and learning is a fact that is too plain to be denied. Many students and even teachers (including Bible teachers) have prepared lessons using resources from the Internet. Churches that

have their information on the Internet can easily be located if anyone needs it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was a lockdown in which movements and gatherings were limited, many brethren and churches used the Zoom application to study the Bible and some still use it to date. These are good ways that the Internet can be used. As Christians, we must ensure to make good use of things to the glory of God. We must let our light shine before men so that they will see our good works and glorify God in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

From the foregoing, it is clear that social media can be an invaluable form of communication. But we must use it properly and avoid using it in a way that would harm our influence. Hence since the church is saddled with the responsibility of communicating the gospel message to the world (evangelism – Matthew 28:19), teaching those converted (edification – Matthew 28:20), and helping her needy saints (benevolence – I Timothy 5:3, 9-10), how can the church effectively use the Internet in these areas to fulfill God's commandments?

One of the ways is by having a functional website where gospel contents can be shared and disseminated to the world. Various websites are available with enough resources that can be very useful. Interestingly, some of these websites have great features – one of which is that it allows viewers to automatically translate the messages into various languages including Nigerian local languages. This means that we can get to preach the word to people even in the languages they understand. There are a lot of people in the virtual community and when churches create rich content (such as Bible studies, pictures of Bible stories, interesting captions and topics for discussions, etc.) they can get to communicate the Word to others.



Another good way is for the church to create social media accounts and post good content on the social media pages. This way, they can invite and direct people to their congregations for Bible studies. In the same vein, when brethren are in need, a church could quickly reach out to other brethren in distant places who may not even

THEME : The Church Of Christ In A Changing World

know them to tell them about their needs, and solutions or helps may be offered just as in the case of Acts 11:27-30. Congregations should also encourage members to share these things on their pages as well. Many individual Christians are active on Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. But what do they post on these pages? Is it just our pictures, achievements, life activities, and things of that kind? How often do we talk about the gospel messages – even if it is only posting Bible passages?



Someone posted on Twitter on the 23rd of July, 2022, and said something that caught my attention about one of the Presidential aspirants that seem to be very popular in Nigeria now. He said "Peter Obi is proof that evangelism is not hard. We just don't send Jesus." I do not know if the individual is a Christian in the sense of how the Bible describes a Christian but I think he made some sense. Since the election is coming closer in Nigeria, I have seen several Christians post on their social media pages campaigning for one politician or the other. I am not saying that this is bad, but how much time and space do we give to posting things about Jesus and His message? The gospel is God's power to save man (Romans 16:16) and we can help spread the Word using our various social media platforms just as we spread other less important things. How about creating groups on these various social media platforms and then inviting friends to teach them the Word? Many people who are into various businesses advertise and organize seminars on social media groups to draw people to patronize their businesses. Why can we not do the same for the sake of Christ and draw people to His kingdom? I believe that many people can be reached with the gospel through this medium as well.



YouTube is a free video-sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. A lot of individuals, business owners, churches, etc. have channels on YouTube where

they upload videos. Churches should encourage their preachers to go on YouTube to preach the Word of God. Door-to-door evangelism may not be as effective as it used to be in the time past due to certain factors, especially in the urban area; and since going on the radio may be too expensive for some congregations, they can upload videos on YouTube and share them. Even most broadcast media organizations are becoming increasingly popular because of their presence on social media including YouTube. But if that is not possible, granting that not everyone may have such ability, churches can subscribe to certain channels that speak the truth and use those resources as their evangelism tool by sharing with others and posting them on their social media pages. By so doing, we are sharing the gospel messages. I have known brethren who got converted to Christ as a result of video messages they consistently watch on YouTube.



Zoom is also another good medium to study the Bible. I know certain congregations and brethren that conduct Bible studies on zoom with their members and others who are far away. Members can invite their friends to join the virtual Bible study if they cannot physically attend the one conducted at the church building. This way, the gospel message is spread. However, these mediums are not to replace the physical gatherings of the church, rather it is to further aid in spreading the Word. The Bible commands coming together to worship God (1 Corinthians 11:20) and we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Based on this, those who are satisfied with virtual worship are not getting it right.

All of these mediums can be used to spread the gospel to the world, teach the Word of God among the saints as well as help one another in time of need and it is strongly encouraged that churches make use of these things to effectively do the work that God has given her in this 21st century. While it is admitted that not everyone has the gift of using the Internet and social media (and some do not even use them). Those who know how to use these things should use them to spread the gospel.

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CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE

by Jobalo Oshikanlu

Bible Gem: And Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" He replied, "Have you never read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED INSEPARABLY TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:3-6).ⁱ

Introduction:

Marriage, also called **matrimony** or **wedlock** is a culturally and often legally recognized union between people called spouses. Marriage is *cultural universal*ⁱⁱ, but the definition of marriage has varied over time between cultures and religions all over the world. Marriage can be recognized by a state, a religious authority, an organization, a local community, a tribal group, or by peers.

Many cultures of the world have various legends concerning the origins of marriage. However, the Bible which is God's revelation to mankind reveals that the union of marriage was instituted by God "in the beginning"ⁱⁱⁱ. In Vol. 1 No. 1 (Jan - March 2021) edition of this magazine, we highlighted that the Bible is the only book that truly reveals the origin and creation of man and the only source that reveals the will of God for mankind. We also highlighted that everything humanity needs to know about God and what He says about the universe, and how mankind should relate with the Creator and amongst themselves, are all taught in the unique and exclusive book called the Bible. We must add here that there is hardly any subject where the Bible's divine authorship is greater accentuated than the subject of marriage, not least due to the cultural universality of marriage, as mentioned above.



The Institution of Marriage:

As part of the creation of the world in Genesis chapter 1, and specifically in the process of creating mankind in Genesis 1:26-31, it is revealed in Genesis 2:7 that God had

first formed the man, and then said in vs.18 that "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." And in vs.21-24:

*"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said 'This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of the Man'. **Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**"^{iv}*

However, our Bible gem Matthew 19:3-6 is the watershed passage where, eventually, the Lord Jesus Christ opens our eyes to the subject of marriage as ordained by God during and as part of the creation. There are a few important points to bear in mind in Matthew 19 vs.3 through to 8. First, Jesus Christ gives the elements needed in the contracting of marriage and declares that when a man and woman observe these elements, God "joins" them. When a man leaves his parents, cleaves^v to his wife and becomes *one flesh* with her, God *joins* them. He didn't say they join themselves or that they have been joined together by themselves. Rather, He says **God** joins them. The marriage registry does not join them. Their parents do not join them. **Man does not join them. God joins them.**

Marriage As Instituted by God:

In answering their questions, Jesus in Matthew 19:4 and 8, refer them to "the beginning". In their questions, they referred Him to Moses. But, instead, Jesus referred them to a time well before Moses. In other words, the Lord was telling them that Moses did not give the true law of God. Jesus took them back at least some 4000 years earlier.^{vi} Everything that happened between "the beginning" and the time of Jesus on earth where marriage is concerned was, in essence, just a report of the activities of men. Moses came to bring regulation, order, or some 'decorum' to those activities. Not that God was satisfied with those activities. But "because of the hardness of their hearts", those activities were tolerated (e.g., divorce or

indiscriminate divorce), albeit with some regulation. Jesus, however, came to restore the will of the God that was pronounced at “the beginning”. In consequence, we are fundamentally in error whenever we try to justify the activities of men, or our cultural traditions in marriage, by referring to the biblically reported practices during the period between “the beginning” and the time of Jesus on earth.

Jesus made it clear that Genesis 2:23-24 was not Moses pontificating or trying to explain. It is the Creator Himself making a pronouncement. The reader is invited to also consider the parallel passages of Mark 10:2-9 and Ephesians 5:30-32, the latter of which additionally reveals the linkage of marriage to Christ and the church. The following qualifying features of marriage as instituted by God would be clear from these passages, and distinguishable from the marriage practices of the modern world:

1. Marriage is amongst *Homo sapiens*. **It is amongst human beings only.** The marriage ordained by God at creation admits no relationship between a human and an animal/beast; any such relationship is inherently perverse and sinful.
2. **Marriage, as ordained by God, is heterosexual.** It is between males and females. The concept of same-sex marriage embraced in our world today is inherently perverse and sinful. The scriptures warn that both male homosexuals and female homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9) and describes such behaviour as “unnatural” and “shameful”, liable to be penalized (Romans 1:27). This means that homosexuals who do not repent are “whoremongers” and will end up in hell fire (Revelation 21:8).
3. **God ordained marriage as monogamy.** It is one man and one woman i.e., two becoming one flesh. See also Malachi 2:14-16 which describes God as Witness to the “covenant” you make with the “wife of your youth” which covenant must not be betrayed.
4. **God ordained marriage to be perpetual.** i.e., only death is capable of severing the bond of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:39). “*What God has joined together, let no one separate*”, says our Bible gem.
5. **There must be no previous tie of marriage on the part of any of the two individuals.** In addition to the Lord’s statements in Matthew 19:7-9, and the above reference in Malachi 2:14-16, Romans 7:2-3 is clear that a spouse who marries somebody else while his or her marriage partner is alive is guilty of adultery.

The Lord also stated the elements or steps for contracting marriage recognized by God to be the following:

- a. To **leave**^{vii} father and mother (i.e., renunciation of their authority, signifying permanence).
- b. To **cleave** or **be joined** to each other (through agreement or marriage vows – Malachi 2:14).

- c. To **become one** body. This “becoming one body” (or “one flesh”) is the sexual act, which is the final element (immediately following which “God has joined” them) and hence, its common description as a “consummation”^{viii}. The best scripture that explains the meaning of “become one flesh” is 1 Corinthians 6:16 which is describing the implications of sexual immorality by stating “*Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is **one body** with her? For “**the two**,” He says, “**shall become one flesh**.”* The same “oneness” achieved in consummating a marriage also occurs in illicit sex. However, in illicit sex, there is no “leaving” (as the agreement is not of a permanent character) or the parties are disqualified from being married (such as by one of them being already married to someone else, etc), and hence the Lord will not join them.”^{ix}

Attitudes of the Modern World Towards Marriage:

The Bible warns that we should “*not be attracted by strange, new ideas*” (Hebrews 13:9, TLB and NLT^x), but instead “*stand in the ways and ... **ask for the old paths**, where the good way is, **and walk in it**; then you will find rest for your souls*” (Jeremiah 6:16). We must remember that the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience (Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). There are increasing ways in which the world has disdained and continues to regard with contempt, the will and the law of God on marriage. We point out a few here:

1. *Same-sex marriage.* Whilst this is a bastardization of marriage as divinely instituted, it is increasingly legal in many jurisdictions of the world, and even recognized and solemnized by many so-called “churches”. “*That comes as no surprise. Even Satan himself pretends to be an angel of light. So it doesn’t surprise us that Satan’s servants also pretend to be serving God. They will finally get exactly what they deserve*” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15, NIRV^{xi}). We have pointed out above that same-sex marriage is inherently perverse and sinful, and that the scriptures warn that both male and female homosexuals will have their part in hell fire (Revelation 21:8).
2. *Civil partnership, civil union, and co-habitation* are increasingly recognized legally as alternatives to marriage in many jurisdictions, including in many cases as a means to provide same-sex couple rights. The fear of marriage ties, obligations, ill-treatment, or other consequences has also led many into civil partnerships or into avoiding marriage altogether. Many find themselves in complicated scenarios that are difficult to dimension or unravel. But we must point out, as Ecclesiastes 7:29 states, that “*God has made man upright, but they have sought out many perversions*” (JUB^{xii}) or “*God made men and*

women true and upright; we're the ones who've made a mess of things" (MSG^{xiii}). We must further warn that the only relationship where God's law allows sex is in marriage, and that the fierce judgment of God is coming up on all those who practice or permit outside-marriage sex (Hebrews 13:4).

3. *Polygamy, polygyny, polyandry, and group marriage.* Polygamy is a marriage that includes more than two spouses. When a man is married to more than one wife at a time, the relationship is called polygyny, and there is no marriage bond between the wives; and when a woman is married to more than one husband at a time, it is called polyandry, and there is no marriage bond between the husbands. If a marriage includes multiple husbands or wives, it can be called a group marriage. These are all various forms of corruption of marriage as instituted by God. God has ordained marriage as only two becoming one flesh. It is strictly monogamous.
4. *The easing of divorce laws.* A statutory right of two married partners to mutually consent to divorce was enacted in western nations in the mid-20th century and has been gradually spreading around the world both by law and by practice. In the United States, for example, no-fault divorce was first enacted in California in 1969, and the final state to legalize it was New York in 1989. God ordained marriage to be perpetual and only death can sever the marriage bond (see 1 Corinthians 7:39). The Lord also permits a partner to divorce his or her spouse only on grounds of sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9).
5. *Separation in marriage.* Many people, including Christians, claim that there is a difference between divorce and separation. Whilst a difference in the time length or duration may be apparent, the word of God recognizes no difference between separation and divorce. Separation and divorce are equally sinful, and equally require genuine repentance as the spiritual panacea (1 Corinthians 7:10-13).
6. *Human traditions in marriage.* Some bind human traditions (dowry, dower, bride price, parental consent, etc.) as part of God's law on marriage. Human traditions, where not sinful, should be respected, but no human tradition should be added or enjoined part of God's law as some do in the churches (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Deuteronomy 4:2). Many also render the word of God of no effect because of human tradition (Mark 7:13; Matthew 15:6; Acts 5:29). Marriage is a right ordained by God for those qualified as described above (1 Corinthians 7:2; 9:5). In some African and Asian cultures, some married couples, after fulfilling the divinely ordained elements, suffer attack, hostility or forced separation at the hands of persons claiming that they remain unmarried. Even churches of Christ sometimes accuse them of living in fornication due to a lack of elements that are extraneous to the divine injunction (such as elaborate ceremonies or parental consent). All

these are as sinful as the direct act of putting away your spouse without cause and as sinful as the external aggression of taking away a man's wife by physical force.

Conclusion:

As with all other facets of human life, persons engaged in conduct contrary to the law of God on marriage must repent or face the wrath of hell (Ephesians 5:31-32; Psalm 1:5; 119:172; 1 John 5:17; Acts 17:30-31).

In addition to repentance from all sin, to escape the punishment of hell, every man/woman is required to:

- Believe Jesus Christ and His gospel (John 3:35-36; 8:24);
- Confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10); and
- Get baptized (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- Do God's will (Matthew 7:21), regularly worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24) and in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:2; Romans 12:1-2)

ⁱ Except for this quote taken from the Amplified Version (AMP) and where otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James' version (NKJV).

ⁱⁱ A **cultural universal** (also called an anthropological universal or human universal) is an element, pattern, trait, or institution that is common to all known human cultures worldwide.

ⁱⁱⁱ "In the beginning" here means as part of God's creation of the universe. See Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

^{iv} Emboldening and underlining for emphasis.

^v The King James Version (KJV) uses the word "cleave" which is the same as "be joined" in NKJV and AMP.

^{vi} Biblical historians say the time of the Patriarchs lasted about 2500 years and that the Mosaical age lasted 1500 years.

^{vii} The word in the original Greek New Testament is "kataleipo" meaning "abandonment".

^{viii} An English word that means "to complete" a process, transaction, or set of activities. There have been Christians and others, of recent, who have argued that the concept of "consummation" in marriage is foreign to the Bible. As long as "consummation" describes the Lord's concept of "becoming one flesh", it is very much part of God's law for the contracting of marriage as any relationship falls short of marriage if the couple has not had or is unable to have sex.

^{ix} The reader should not confuse the "joining" (cleaving) by vows or agreement with the second joining by God. The Holy Spirit uses different Greek words for the two. The first joining (by vows or agreement) is from the Bible Greek "kollao" whilst the second joining is from the Bible Greek "sunzeugnumi" (meaning a "yoking together").

^x The Living Bible translation and the New Living Translation.

^{xi} The New International Reader's Version.

^{xii} Jubilee Bible 2000 translation.

^{xiii} The Message Bible translation.

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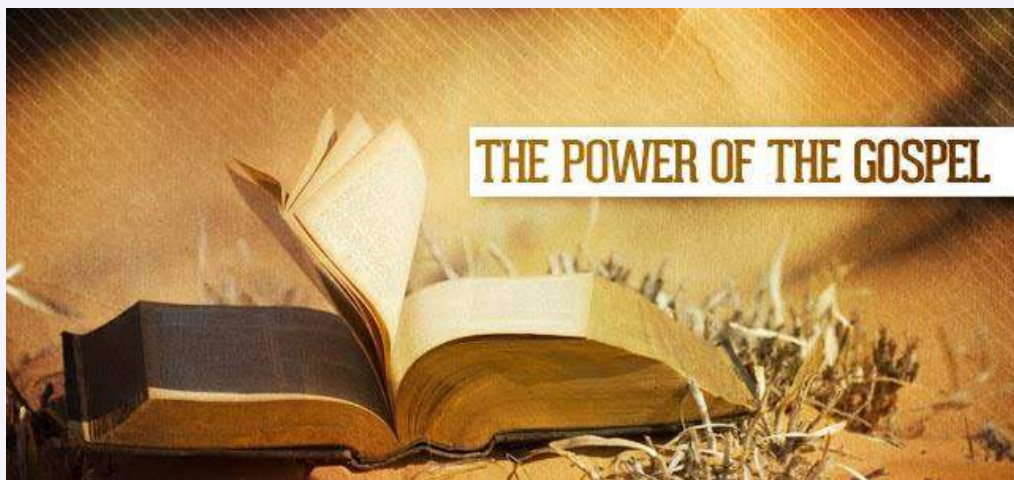
CAN THE GOSPEL BE CHANGED TO MAKE IT MORE ATTRACTIVE?

by Oladapo Olawale

When sin entered the world through Adam, it resulted in physical and spiritual death for all men (Romans 5:12; 6:23); mankind fell short of the glorious standard of God with no hope of restoration (Romans 3:23). The Gospel of Christ thus presents the good news of God's gracious plan of redemption (Romans 5:12-20; 6:23; John 3:16). The wonderful message of the gospel is about Christ and His Crucifixion (1 Cor. 2: 1- 2). Simply, it is about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15: 1-5). This gospel message is described as the power of God for the salvation of mankind (for anyone who believes it, Romans 1:16). It is the escape route from the reality of eternal destruction!

However, the truth of the gospel about sin and its inescapable outcome of everlasting punishment is a topic that generally does not appeal to the physical component of man's existence. Millions of people today would deny and wish away the problem of sin; but the judgment of God is certain over the sinful actions of men on earth (Hebs. 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10)! In the same vein, the earthly nature of man struggles to comprehend the simplicity of the gospel plan of God and how same can satisfy some of his earthly cravings.

In a bid to appease our worldly desires, many often seek ways to modify the gospel to make it more 'attractive' to our earthly sensations. Some posit that the gospel must always adapt itself to our worldly aspirations and goals for it to be considered relevant. Whereas God has already adapted the gospel to man's basic need, namely salvation of his soul (2 Peter 1:3). The 'wisdom of man' has always considered the plain message of the gospel as either too simple, inadequate, or foolish. This article briefly considers whether the basic message of the gospel is sufficient to save or whether it requires human embellishment to fulfill the purpose of God for our salvation.



The Power of the Gospel

The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is God's power unto salvation. Acts 2:37-47 presents to us the moving effect of the gospel. The Bible says that the people who heard the gospel on the day of Pentecost were touched in their hearts that they not only inquired about what they needed to do to be saved from their sins but also obeyed the message by being baptized. What were the features of the message that moved about three thousand souls

on Pentecost to be baptized? Essentially, they heard about the sinless and pure life of Christ, His suffering and agony on the cross, and resurrection to serve as the propitiation/sacrifice for the sins of the world. This message portrayed hope to the three thousand who believed it and saved themselves from their perverse generation. Obedience to this good news brought them back into a relationship with God.

Sin remains man's greatest tragedy; like David, every man bears the guilt of sin (Psalm 32:5). The author of Hebrews describes sin as a weight that needs to be cast aside (Hebs. 12:1). Sin is also likened to a sickness which afflicts the soul of man (Isaiah 1:5); it brings shame (1 Cor 15:13) and is so ugly that God cannot behold it (Habakkuk 1:13). The continuous state of man in sin is therefore bad news. The gospel of Christ is the good news of redemption which everyone living in sin needs to hear.

2 Cor. 4: 3 -7 described the gospel as the lighthouse of God for those who live in darkness to behold. It, however, remains veiled to those who are perishing because they have chosen to be blinded by Satan (god of this age) to believe that they need no saving at all let alone by the death and resurrection of Christ (see also 1 Cor 1: 18 - 25). The power of God is available for salvation to everyone who believes today as it was on the day of Pentecost. Obedience to the gospel brings justification (Romans 4:25); newness of life (Romans 6:4); fruit-bearing (Romans 7:4); resurrection from the dead (Romans 8:11) and ultimately salvation (Romans 10:9).

It is pertinent to note that the gospel of God is what saves, not the preacher. God is neither looking for eloquent speakers to mesmerize people nor gimmicks or any human devices to win souls because he wants salvation to rest on His word (1 Cor 1: 18 – 31; 2: 1- 5,13; 2 Cor 4:5). When men rely on anything other than the gospel, they are converted to someone or something else other than Christ. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul was determined to preach nothing else but the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 2:2).

The gospel of Christ is God's truth that everyone needs to know to be free from sin (John 8:32; 17:17). The gospel as God's word is alive and powerful, sharper than any double-edged sword and can pierce into the innermost part of any man who believes it (Hebrews 4:12). God's weapon of salvation is not carnal, it is mighty and capable of bringing every thought under His subjection (2 Cor. 10:4). The word of God received with meekness can save souls (James 1:21).

The Gospel or Social Gospel

In Romans 1:16, the Apostle Paul speaks of 'the gospel' to suggest the singularity of the message of Christ and nothing else for the salvation of mankind. In Galatians 1: 6 - 9, the Apostle then referred to a 'different gospel' contrary to 'the gospel'. In so doing, Paul sought to show that the gospel can be perverted, and anyone involved in such, stands condemned before God even if he were to be an angel. He went on to emphasize this point in Galatians 1:10 that the gospel is not geared towards pleasing men, rather the gospel is designed for man to please God through obedience to its message.

In what seemed as discontent with the sufficiency of the message of the gospel to save, many have suggested and taught that the gospel as it is, is not relevant enough in this modern time to capture the attention of men let alone save them. In their desire to ensure the church expand rapidly, the idea of the social gospel was developed. This false concept of the gospel generally pre-supposes that the gospel in its simple form cannot minister to the whole of man, it must adapt itself to also meet the social needs of man to make it enjoyable. The focus is thus shifted from the spiritual and matters of eternal life to earthly and mundane things.

Many incidences of the social gospel have developed over the years. Examples include building a gymnastics centre in the church where aerobic exercises and weight-loss lessons can be offered, organizing sports activities, movies, art sessions, and all forms of entertainment and church-sponsored recreation. In many denominations, it is very common to have the social gospel institutionalized and practiced. Many in the Lord's church have also grown enthused by these practices. All these recreations are employed to lure people to the gospel.

In some cases where the social gospel has become institutionalized, it has been added to the mission of the church. The church now dabbles into secular businesses or raises money through seemingly innocuous business ventures such as printing and publishing companies, farms, apartment houses, schools, hospitals, etc. with the excuse of guaranteeing job opportunities for its members and invariably attracting non-Christians to the church.

Others try to make it the business of the church to provide secular education with aim of luring people. The church teaches the bible and not Mathematics, Biology, Literature, etc. The church neither has the authority to establish, build, fund, and oversee schools nor contribute its funds to schools established by individuals. Employing this as bait to preach the gospel amounts to a perversion of the gospel and the divine mission of the church. The social gospel is false and contrary to the gospel for the following reasons:

- (a) Its concerns are different from the original gospel in that whereas it focuses on mundane and earthly things such as diseases, poverty, secular education, and so on, those who preach the gospel are concerned with the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of men's souls (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:16).
- (b) The social gospel emphasizes the material well-being of man, whereas the true gospel stresses man's spiritual well-being (Matthew 6:31-33; John 6:26-29).
- (c) Preaching the social gospel is motivated by a desire to improve living conditions here on earth. Whereas preaching of the original gospel is motivated by the desire for a heavenly home with God, the desire to avoid hell, in pursuit of eternal happiness (1 Peter 1:3-12; 1 Timothy 4:6-8).
- (d) The social gospel is based on human and worldly wisdom that cannot save (1 Corinthians 1:20 – 21). Whereas preaching the gospel rests on the wisdom of God (James 3:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:25).

Benevolence as Gimmicks

Reference is usually made to the book of Galatians 6:10 where the bible enjoins us to do good to all men. This is thought to justify the use of benevolence as a gimmick for evangelism. However, the passage was only discussing the responsibilities of individual Christians rather than the church. The work of benevolence by the local congregations as discussed in the New Testament was that of relieving the needs of the saints. See Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; and 2 Cor. 8-9. These passages show that the early church relieved the needs of its members. Relieving the needs of the poor of the whole world was never given to the church, so far as we can read from the New Testament.

The benevolent work of the church towards its needy is limited to a certain real class of needy who do not have Christian relatives that can take care of them. Paul stated this in 1 Tim. 5:16. the church can't take care of all the needy of the world as in so doing it would exhaust all its resources and be left to do no other work given to it by God. Be that as it may, extraordinary, and special circumstances may necessitate that the church extends its benevolence to non-Christians. For instance, in cases of natural disasters, war, crisis, famine, or other extreme situations. In such instances, mercy and kindness dictate that the church helps needy non-Christians by accommodating them and feeding them (Matthew 12:1 – 8). This is however an exceptional circumstance and not the rule.

Individual Christians preaching the gospel are not entitled to employ benevolence as bait to preach the gospel as doing so derails from the substance of the message. Providing benevolence to people to entice them to accept the gospel message is a perversion of the original gospel and was never condoned by Christ while he was alive (John 6:26 – 29).

CONCLUSION

The unique and simple message of hope and salvation is challenging for many to understand especially in the light of various conflicting religious teachings in the world today. One can easily be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel, considering people's indifference and at times hatred of the message of the gospel, so much so that we think of a substitute for this message. But the gospel remains God's power of salvation (2 Timothy 1:8, Roms 1:16).

The people in Christ's day were not completely moved by even the miracles of Christ to believe Him. They only sought Him for earthly bread (John 6:26-29). Undoubtedly men are mainly moved by the things that satisfy our physical needs. But the gospel seeks to satisfy our greatest need of eternal life. Let us have confidence in its power to save and rest assured that it is God who brings the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

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POLITICS AND THE CHURCH

by Opemipo Olusola

The word "church" (Greek ekklesia) is a collective noun, and thus by the very definition of the word itself, it is composed of people. But the church of Christ is composed of people who have answered the calling of the gospel, (2Thess.2:14), thus called-out people. These people belonging to God (Col.1:2; Jhn.17:9-10, 24; 1Pet.2:9-10; 1Cor.6:20).

The church is not a man-made organization. The church is a divine institution, planned in eternity; Originated from the mind of God; Prophesied about by the old Testament prophets; Prepared for by John the Baptist; established on Pentecost day in the city of Jerusalem according to the promise of Christ, Eph.3:10-11; Isa.2:1-3; Matt.3:1-5; Acts.2:36-47; Matt.16:18-19.

The mission of the church is listed in Eph. 4:12;

1. **Perfection of the saints**, (i.e. Indoor training of the saved ones to help them become mature in the knowledge of Christ). Matt.28:20.

2. **The work of ministry** (i.e sharing and distribution of reliefs to the qualified needy members), Rom.15:25-27; 1Tim.5:1-16; Jam.2:15-16.

3. **The edification of the Body of Christ**: This is the work of evangelism to expand the shores of the kingdom of Christ. The responsibility of taking the church of Christ to new areas and increasing the numerical strength of the local church, Acts.13:1-5.

The local church has to teach its members to do the following;

1. **Pray for the civil government**;
1 Timothy 2:1-2 (KJV); **"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."**

2. **Submit to the government as long as the law of Christ is not violated**;
Romans 13:1-2 (KJV); "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

3. **Pay the government its dues (Taxes, licenses, duties, etc.)**;
Matthew 22:21 (KJV); **"They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."**

4. **Honor the king by voting to enthrone justice and righteousness**;
1 Pet.2:17 (KJV); **"Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."** Proverbs 16:12 (KJV); **"It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness."** Proverbs 14:34 (KJV); **"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."**

When Christians refuse to carry out their civic responsibilities, it gives room for evil to spread and to establish unrighteousness in the land! Proverbs 29:2 (KJV);

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

When the righteous multitudes and men of good conscience stay away from the nations' election, then they have given room for the wicked rulers to sit on the throne, which consequently will cause much suffering for their children and for those whom they seek to save through the gospel of Christ!

Hear what God said to Israelites in the land of Babylon, a city ruled over by a pagan king; Jeremiah 29:7 (KJV); **"And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."**

Christians as citizens of both the Heavenly city and of the earthly country where we live are expected to be a light of love and good works anywhere! Matthew 5:14 (KJV); **"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid"**.

It is good to work to promote government policies that seek the well-being of our neighbors, our communities, and the state at large as we have the opportunity, to further the gospel in a peaceful environment! Remember, failure to do that which is good is a sin, Jam.4:17.

IS POLITICS INHERENTLY EVIL?

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines politics as the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government.

Politics has to do with government. The Bible says the government is an institution of God; Romans 13:1-4; Politics is not evil in itself. The government is established by God for the good and well-being of the people. A nation's president who ensures justice, righteousness, equity, distributes relief to the poor, peaceful coexistence of the people, etc. will not be judged as being evil!

Politics becomes evil only when the men in governance employ earthly wisdom in their rulings and display ungodly attitudes; James 3:14-16 (KJV); **"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."**

A loyal disciple of Christ must abstain from every kind of political activity that involves immoral behaviors, injustices, cultism, idolatry, killings, embezzling public funds, defamation of characters of the opponents, and the likes! 1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV); **"Abstain from all appearance of evil"**.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF POLITICS

1. CAN A CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS?

Yes, as long as the evils which are listed above are not practiced. And more importantly, his God-given duties in his local church must not diminish! Eph.4:7,16; Heb.10:24-25. God made His will known to the pagan rulers through the lives of Joseph and Daniel who were both involved in the politics of the Egyptians and the Babylonians respectively!

Let us remember the wise counsel of King Solomon: Proverbs 12:28 (KJV); "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." A Christian must avoid such political activities that enthrone unrighteousness!

2. CAN A PREACHER BE AN ACTIVE POLITICIAN?

A preacher is a proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ from one place to another! He is also called an evangelist or a minister (servant), 1Cor.3:5; 2Tim.4:5. Politics is lawful to be engaged in by every Christian but it is not expedient for a preacher!

The reason is that the work of an evangelist requires whole devotion; 2 Timothy 4:5 (KJV); **"But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."** 1 Tim.4:15; **"Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress."**

Paul, an exemplary evangelist would not have been a successful soul-winner if he had been entangled with the political system of his days! 2 Tim.2:3-4; **"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus . No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-he wants to please his commanding officer."**

Note; KJV used the word "entangle" in the above quotation, 2Tim.2:4. The word entangle means "ENSNARE; to involve in a perplexing or troublesome situation." (Merriam Webster dictionary)

Hence, He needs to be watchful over his life! 1 Timothy 4:16 (KJV); **"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."** So, it is advisable for the Lord's servant to be devoted, to be more focused on his soul-winning business, and perform his civic duties as he is opportune.

3. CAN A CHRISTIAN BE NOMINATED FOR A POLITICAL POSITION?

Yes, if he is deemed fit by the general public! Many Christians I know have been nominated for the position of "the community chairman", and their leadership benefitted the community. Now if such a community recommends the Christian chairman for the position of Local government chairman or state senator, there is nothing bad in it!

Provided that such a Christian has counted the costs! so that venturing into political activities will not take away the hope of eternal life from him or her? Judges 9:8-9, 13 (KJV);

"The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.... But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

Olive and Vine trees will not leave their usefulness to God and men, just because they desired to be made king over other trees in the forests!

It amounts to great dishonour and disservice to Christ for a Christian, a preacher, or an elder to resign from their position in their local church duties to become "a king" among the ungodly people! But if you are persuaded by the people to take up a public responsibility, you are privileged to spell out your condition of service easily, (in

such a way that your Christian duties are not diminished nor eroded).

Matthew 5:16 (KJV); **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."**

4. IS THE CHURCH A POLITICAL ORGANISATION?

The revealed Law of the Old Testament Scriptures constituted the Law of the Israelite nation. Exs.34:27; Lev.26:46. No king in Israel could prosper on his throne while rejecting the law of Moses given to Israel as God's nation.

So, there was no clear distinction between religion and politics here in the Old Testament era. But under the New Testament times, Jesus Christ separated the concept of secular power from that of His spiritual missions. **"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"** (Mark 12:17).

Jhn.18:36; "Jesus said, **'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'**" The Church of Christ is the kingdom of God on earth, Matt.16:18-19. She is saddled with three spiritual missions as listed earlier in this article.

The church is an eternal plan of God, which was established by Christ for the following reasons: To preserve a holy and blameless people unto Himself, Eph.1:3-5; To serve the good pleasures (will) of God on the earth, Eph.1:6,9; To the praise of God's glory, Eph.1:6,12.

Therefore, the New Testament church should not engage in civil/state politics. Rather, all the traditions and all the political kingdoms of men wherever they are on the earth must bow to the authority of Jesus Christ. Daniel 7:13-14 ; Matthew 28:18, 20 ; "The mixture of state politics with the Church activities could only be experienced in the churches of men, the apostate churches.

Thus, worldly politics have no room in the church founded by Christ, our Lord, and Saviour. Please note that there are certain things that the church cannot do but an individual Christian can do. A Christian may establish a restaurant, colleges, hospitals, build housing estates, buy buses, etc. for commercial purposes. But a local church, being the ground and the pillar of truth has no such duties. 1Tim.3:15. A Christian may engage in politics in a godly manner with all due spiritual vigilance. 1Pet.5:8-9. But the Church of God does not get involved in state politics nor allow the pulpit to be turned into an election campaign ground.

Christians as strangers and pilgrims here on earth are duty-bound to be good citizens on earth, and promote godly leadership as a sign of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Participating in voting exercise is very important to ensure that righteousness is enthroned in our earthly nations: Remember that many good men and women have fought in times past, for the present freedom you are enjoying, stopping the slave trade, forcing the government to adopt better labour policies, and encouraging laws that forbid domestic violence, human trafficking, abortion, etc. Jesus Christ our Lord was going about doing good. Acts10:38

May we continue to think good and do good all the days of our lives in Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

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CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS MORAL VICES

by Kayode Adekunle

Wikipedia defines morality as the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper while moral is regarded as standards of behaviour; principles of right and wrong. On the other hand, vices are considered to be a set of behaviour, or habits generally considered immoral, sinful, criminal, rude, taboo, depraved, degrading, deviant or perverted in the associated society. In more minor usage, vice can refer to a fault, a negative character trait, a defect, or a bad or unhealthy habit.



The Bible is very clear about how God views the issues concerning moral vices. God's displeasure for the immoral behaviours of man is never hidden. God destroyed the first world as a result of the "wickedness of man" Gen 6:5-7. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of immorality Gen 19:12-29. In the New Testament, God condemns in great terms all forms of moral vices. Romans 1:18 says **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"**. Paul makes it clear that they are **"works of the flesh"** and those who engage in them **"will not inherit the kingdom of God"** Gal 5:19-20; 1 Cor 6:9-11. God warned Christians not to be partakers in immoral activities that abound in the world **"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person"** 1 Cor 5:9-11

It is however so sad and disheartening that despite God's warnings in the scripture, the world still wallows in abject immorality and it is even more disturbing that the Church is not immune to these vices. Some of the rampant vices, especially among the youths are fornication, gambling, immoral dressing, internet fraud, etc.



Fornication

Fornication means having sexual intercourse between two people who are not married. It is also referred to as adultery and God states categorically that those who engage in it will be **"judged"** Heb13:4. Paul warned the brethren in Corinth that committing fornication is "joining one's body to that of a harlot" 1 Cor 6:15. He further warned the brethren to flee fornication because it done against one's body **"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"** John says that "sexually immoral" people will have "their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death" Rev 21:8. No matter how the world views the issue of fornication, the fact remains that it is an ungodly act and God frowns at it. To avoid fornication, **"let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband"** 1 Cor 7:2



Gambling

Wikipedia defines gambling as the wagering of something of value on an event with an uncertain outcome with the intent of winning something else of value. Gambling thus requires three elements to be present: consideration, risk, and a prize. Gambling could come in different forms, such as playing the lottery, betting on games, flipping coins, or entering some contests. Though the Bible does not mention gambling

directly, however, when we consider the fact that the motivation for gambling is the desire to make quick money, then we realize that God is not happy about it and does not want any of His children to indulge in it. What is one of the reasons that people gamble and play the lottery? They covet money, quick and easy. 1 Timothy 6:10 declares that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Therefore, the enticement of gambling and playing the lottery comes under these texts. **Proverbs 13:11** says, **"Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow."** Gambling is a result of covetousness. Christ has this to say on covetousness **"And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.'" Luke 12:15**

Immodest Dressing

Anything immodest is whatever lacks humility and decency. Dressing is expected to be done to cover the body and compliment body beauty. However, the trend in the world today where women especially expose their bodies in their dressing in other to entice men is immoral and totally against the will of God. God's desire for women to dress is clearly expressed by Paul in 1Tim 2:9 **"Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness with good works."** Christians are not expected to conform to the world in their dressing because we are not of the world Rom 12:2; 11 Cor 6:14. Immoral dressing destroys the temple of God which is our bodies 1Cor 6:19 and it is also part of "worldly desire" that Peter warns Christians to run away from 1 Pet 2:11-12



Internet Fraud

Engaging in Internet fraud is a dishonest way of making money. It is stealing and the Bible condemns stealing Eph 4:28. God says this through Prophet Micah **"Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, Also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and**

his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Behold, against this family, I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks; nor shall you walk haughtily, for this is an evil time.'" Micah 2:1-3

The desire of God is for his children to do honest jobs to earn their living. Paul says this to the Christians in Thessalonica **"that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."** 1Thess 4:11-12.

CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly states that **"without holiness, no one can see God"** Heb 12:14. Immorality destroys holiness and as Children of God we should try everything within our power to see that we avoid all forms of immorality that can make us derail our way to eternity.

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