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THE DEGRADATION OF CHRISTIAN STANDARDS AND VALUES IN NIGERIA: CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

The problems associated with Christianity have been enormous since time immemorial. The name Christian, which connotes Christ-likeness, is supposed to be respected and held in high esteem, but unfortunately, the reverse is the case, as one can hardly differentiate between a Christian and a non-Christian, a believer and an unbeliever, due to conduct and general lifestyle. Christians are the light and salt of the earth. For this, they are role models, leaders, inspirers, motivators, encouragers, counselors, a voice to the voiceless, and hope to the hopeless. Therefore, the intention of this research work is to highlight some of the ways that Christian standards and values are being abused, degraded, and bastardized. The paper also looks at the consequences and effects this has on society and proposes solutions that will help restore, redeem, and reposition the church to her rightful place and rightly portray the right image of Jesus Christ in the lives of his followers.

Keywords: materialism, lust, greed, destitution, christians

Introduction

In this article, the degradation of Christian standards and values is geared towards exploring the activities of Christians in Nigeria in particular. How Christians have been able to thrive in their walk with God One of the critical areas in which Christians have derailed from the track of service to God is materialism, which has become a major trend of the 21st century. When Christians become perverse by turning away from the right way through their thoughts and actions contrary to the standards and values, ethics, and principles, that is degradation and a slap on the face. Materialism has eaten very deeply into the hearts of the people, so much so that it has become a social norm that even Christians, who are supposed to tread with caution, get entangled and engulfed in such atrocities.

As ambassadors of God (Heaven), God has not left his children alone to fend for themselves. He said, Ask and you shall receive; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened unto you (Mat. 7:7). Christians' supply and upkeep are from heaven, so Christians must always look up to heaven (God) for their needs, desires, comfort, and safety. Christians are not to be materialistically conscious but heavenly conscious and focused. This article also dwells heavily on materialism and, at the same time, looks at the factors and causes that lead to materialism, such as lust, destitution, and greed.

To downgrade or degrade is to devalue, reduce in status, grade rank, make less important, and lose relevance. Degradation of Christians standards and values in Nigeria by the same Christians is unethical and unacceptable.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives us a clue on the meaning of the word "degradation": (a) to lower in grade, rank, or status; (b) to strip of rank or honors; (c) to lower to an interior or less effective level; (d) to bring to law esteem or into disrepute; and (e) to drag down in moral or intellectual character. Similarly, the Cambridge dictionary defines "Degradation" as: (a) "The process in which the beauty or quality of something is destroyed or spoiled." (c) "The situation in which people are made to feel they have no value. (d) The process by which something is made worse, especially the quality of land."

Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”¹; “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness”² “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under feel of men”³; “Ye are the light of the world of city that is set on an hill cannot be hid”⁴; Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house⁵; and “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father, which is in heaven”⁶.

Therefore, God wants Christians, His followers, and His children to operate in the capacity of a God who is the glory, splendor, and beauty of Christianity. God did not place His children under him but on top of him so that they could represent him here on earth. God places men, especially his children, in positions of honor, respect, dignity, and value. One of the Christian standards is that men ought to see their good works and glorify the Father. Christians are to lighten the dark places of the earth and savor bitter, ugly, and unpleasant circumstances and conditions. Light is the solution to darkness, just as salt is the solution to bitterness and adds flavor to life. If Christians could not uphold the values and standards laid down by their master and Lord, then they had degraded them. As ambassadors, Christians are not to engage in abominable acts and practices. There is no need to join the unbelievers to do the kind of things that they do. There are various ways in which Christian standards and values are being degraded. Some of these ways are mentioned below for our understanding.

Materialism

The cares of this world, putting more interest on the physical and material things rather than the things of the spirit. Materialism as a form of philosophical monism which holds matter to the fundamental substance is nature and all things including mental states and consciousness are result of material interactions of material thing (en.m.wikipedia.org). Longman Dictionary of contemporary English defines materialism as, “The belief that money and possessions are more important than art, religion, moral belief etc”. Materialism is shifting or diversion of affection, passion attention away from spiritual things towards the worldly things, it is an act of developing more or kin interest on material things rather than developing a good, friendly relationship. The basis for existence is **love**—to love God with all totality and also to love others just as you love yourself. Jesus said in the book of Luke, chapter 10:27, "And he answering said, thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." The love of God must be paramount above all. I John 3:18, “My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but indeed and in truth. I John 2:15, "love not the world or the things that are in the world; if any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in him". Loving the world and the things that are of the world is against Christian values and standards. I John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God that we keep his

¹ John 9:5

² John 12:46

³ Matthew 5:13

⁴ Matthew 5:14

⁵ Matthew 5:15

⁶ Matthew 5:16

commandments, and His commandments are not grievous". Materialism can be said to be a worldly base against things of God. Materialism is centered on physical things to satisfy the body rather than the spirit. Materialism is pursuing things that are of the world, especially flashy, glittering, and appealing materials and objects to satisfy the body. Getting so entangled in the things of the world more than the things of God. The drive towards materialism. There are certain factors that tend to push men into materialism, and we are going to be looking at some of them.

Lust

Merriam-Webster dictionary says that lust is "usually intense or unbridled sexual desire, lasciviousness," "on intense longing, craving." Cambridge Dictionary: 'a very strong sexual desire (b) a very powerful feeling of wanting something'. I will say that lust is a strong urge, a desperate desire, or a longing after something or someone against the normal or appropriate way. The craving for, the drive towards, and the passion to get something desperately could lead to breaking the laid-down rules, regulations, protocols, principles, and procedures. Doing things in an abnormal way, which is against Christian standards, values, and ethics.

The Holy Bible condemns lust in the book of I John 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. Christians believe the followers of Jesus Christ are enjoined not to lust after anything or anyone, as lust is evil. Lust is an intense desire for something. Lust of the flesh is everything that appeals to carnal and physical appetites. What is lust of the flesh? <http://www.gotquestion.com>, January 4, 2022, says, "When fleshly desires rule us, taking priority over God's will, we violate God's righteousness" "Sinful lust is an overpowering desire for that which God has forbidden, I Jn. 2:15-16." The desire of the flesh and the desire of the spirit are always at war, struggling to rule over each other, and once there is such conflict, a winner always emerges. A Christian must not allow the flesh to overpower the spirit, but must allow the spirit to always influence and dictate actions, deeds, and manifestations.

The lust of the flesh is part of worldliness, propelled by the desire for worldly, selfish pleasures, that draws hearts away from God and eventually leads to separation from God. In Gen. 3:6, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a true thing to be desired to make one wise, She took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and she gave also it to her husband with her, and he did eat". According to Philip Wijaya (2021), the lust of the flesh is "an intense desire for an object or circumstances (e.g., sexuality, money, or power)." To go with these definitions, fleshly desires are acts including drunkenness and the intake of excessive amounts of intoxicated drinks to elevate the body above normal. Drugs such as nicotine, tramadol, cocaine, marijuana, and other substances that high the body to have pleasure

Farukh Saleem (2022) says some leaders are power-hungry to the extreme. Some leaders have an insatiable desire for power, and some leaders have an ardent lust for dominance. This ardent ordeal of lust for dominance is no different from extreme selfishness". "Lust is a psychological force producing intense desire for something." People seek power to dominate, control, and influence others. Absalom, in the book of II Sam. 15:23, lusted after power by deceiving the

people; he was made a judge to oversee some of the affairs in Israel. He skimmed his way into the hearts of the people and gained their trust and favor in preparation to become king, even when he knew that the throne was not meant for him but for his brother Solomon. He had to buy this father's most trusted counselor, and when David heard about it, he was devastated and had to pray a prayer to God to turn the counselor Ahithophel to foolishness because he knew he was in trouble with Ahithophel on the side of Absalom. Absalom tried to overthrow his father and unseat him from the throne. This is lost power. In a situation where power and position keep revolving around a few sets of selfish individuals in the political terrain in Nigeria as if they are the only ones or are the best in town, it is baffling, disgusting, and despicable, as they are always there to serve themselves and not the people. They can kill, bribe, and do anything to remain in power. The worst part is that most of the people who indulge themselves in such acts and practices are Christians, bastardizing, downgrading, and devaluing Christianity. Christians must not struggle or engage in abominable acts to be elevated because promotion comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south, but God is the judge; He can promote one and demote another (Ps. 75:6-7).

Greed

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines greed as a selfish and excessive desire for something (such as money) that is then needed. A greedy person can commit any crime to ensure that he satisfies his desire; he can violate any law procedure or policy without minding what it hurts. Greed can also be associated with anything, such as food, social status, or power relationships. According to Thucydides, the cause of all these evils was the lust for power arising from greed and ambition, and from these passions proceeded the violence of parties once engaged in contention.

Greed holds much power in influencing human interactions, and as someone who is a part of society, you are most likely not new to it. Eating food is good and healthy, but excessive eating leads to health challenges. Drinking water is definitely good and should be commended. Excessive drinking of water could lead to hyponatremia, which can be life-threatening in the same way an excessive desire for anything leads to challenges (Cowrywise.com/bog).

Greed can then be said to be unable or unwilling to control the desire for excessive urge and demand for things not necessary, especially at the moment. A greedy person will never be satisfied, no matter the level he gets to or the wealth he accumulates. A greedy person has an insatiable and unquestionable desire. The pursuit of money and material possessions is the primary aim of a greedy person. They can go to any length necessary to keep getting and remaining in power. According to Christian standards, values, and principles, Christians are expected to be content with whatever is their due and whatever they can get. They are to share what they have with others. A greedy person will not want to give opportunities to others but only to themselves. Christians nowadays have no shame.

In a situation where someone holds on to power or position without considering others, it's greed. In a situation where someone is not letting others have a share in what is in abundance enough to have it go round and round, this is greed. Such people could be seen in our political

circle. They can even kill in order to remain in power; they don't care. Greedy people can extort from anyone without care, and they forget about God. Prov. 21:26 "He coveth greedily all the day long, but the righteous giveth and spareth." A greedy person hides even from the poor and needy. They have neither a conscience nor human feelings. Prov. 1:18–19, Isa. 56:11. In Favor Onojodofia's (2023) *Psychology of Greed*, he mentioned lack, discontentment, unmet emotional needs, envy, and insecurity as reasons for greed. Discontentment, not satisfaction, not contentment with what they have or the position they occupy. Christians are blessed; they should not go the way of the world so as to please their master in heaven.

Destitution

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, destitute is seen as lacking something needed or desirable, lacking possessions and resources, and suffering extreme poverty. So being extremely poor and lacking the means to provide for oneself means being unable to fend for or cater for oneself. The inability to shoulder the responsibility of taking adequate care of oneself or family members has pushed some ardent Christians into the abominable—the indecent and wayward type of living that is distasteful. The basic needs of humans are food, clothing, and shelter; then come others like education. It is a fact that human needs are inherent and very essential and must be sorted out; if not, you become useless and worthless before your family members, friends, and associates.

After deploring various methods or means necessary that failed or proved abortive, they tend to resort to detestable acts in order to fend for themselves. Pressure from family members, such as wives or children, to meet a particular need can trigger negative thoughts and imagination that could lead someone to venture into something they never planned or anticipated. Some Christians who eventually become laughing stocks among their friends, colleagues, and family members get frustrated, ashamed, and discouraged in the process and decide to make it at all costs or by all means, putting their hands into evil practices and activities just to make ends meet after trying and failing for too long.

A friend may agree to help you out, but on condition that you join his cult association, the sacrifices involved will not be disclosed to you in the initial state, and the moment you get yourself deeper, you are hooked on a journey of no return. Most of the cult men would not want to help someone knowing the sacrifices they might have made to get themselves wealth, so they will only introduce you so as to make your own sacrifice. Some rules of the occult could be that you do not help a non-member, so whomever you want to help out of concern could only be introduced into the cult. So destitution has pushed some Christians into cults, ritual killing, prostitution, armed robbery, corruption, indecency, betrayal, and illegal businesses such as drugs, cocaine, weapons, and the like. Because poverty keeps steering them in the wrong direction, they will be left with no choice but to join the wrong part out of poverty, shame, and humiliation. Based on Christian standards, values and ethics have been bastardized. The term Christlike is abused and downgraded.

Consequences and Solutions

Consequences

Gross Enmity will be eminent. The Best of friends, siblings, colleagues, and associates could become gross enemies as a result of hurt feelings through betrayal, denial of rights and privileges, refusal to render the assistance we need most, backbiting, and killings of loved ones. A long-established relationship will abruptly come to an end.

Dent of Image and Personality: People who engage in distasteful acts dent their image and that of the entire family. They may not be ashamed of themselves, but their families are, so their reputation is at stake as they will no longer walk in the streets with their shoulders high.

- The name of the Lord God is being reproached and blasphemed as the so-called Christians keep provoking him with their constant atrocities because they will be mocked, and you call yourself a Christian. God's servants who follow Jesus Christ.
- Many souls, destinies, and potential leaders are denied fulfilling their destinies.
- It cripples and truncates the work of the gospel as people who trusted in God and their friends will begin to lose hope as a result of Christian misconduct, an indecent lifestyle, and immorality.
- 5:13; Jn 15:2: – Lost of Soul: It could lead to permanent separation from God if amends are not made on time. Hellfire will be the final destination of such persons who abuse the call to salvation. Matt. 5:13.

Solutions

- The government should create an enabling environment where her citizens are well-equipped to do jobs to meet the needs of the youth. Also, public information that is meant for the betterment of the people should equally be properly channeled, used, and distributed judiciously.
- Culprits and perpetrators of crime or evil should be made to face the consequences of their actions and should not be tolerated to serve as a deterrent to others.
- Churches should place disciplinary action on whoever goes against the standards and values that promote the kingdom of God and rubbish the image of Christ rather than

giving them titles and making them sit in high positions as front-liners in the church. They should be ostracized, sanctioned, or excommunicated.

- Morals, discipline, and proper education should be enforced on the youth, who are the leaders of tomorrow.
- Christians should be patient enough to wait on God, who never forgets nor abandons His children, rather than seek alternative measures elsewhere, as alternative gods as short cuts will only lead to destruction.

Conclusion

The Bible says that if we walk in the spirit, we won't fulfill the desire of the flesh. Christians are hereby enjoined to walk in the spirit so as not to be desirous of vain glory. They are to crucify the flesh with the affections of lust and allow the spirit of God to lead, guide, and influence their thoughts, feelings, utterances, actions, and every step in life. Jesus says to watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation. Christians must watch whatever or whoever comes around them not to be deceived, misled, or misguided. Get rooted in Jesus and refuse to be uprooted from him. Get solidified in faith so as not to become discouraged, frustrated, weakened, or faint in the day of adversity. Christians don't compromise their faith. "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

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