



## Worldliness: A Challenge to a Maturing Christian, Preacher and/or Theologian

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### ABSTRACT

Worldliness, the condition of being overly concerned with worldly affairs, especially to the neglect of spiritual things, is a challenge to Christians. The threat of worldliness to a maturing Christian, Preacher, or Theologian and how it can be dealt with, is the focus of this paper. The fundamental definition of “worldly” relates the totality of all the things that go on in this world: lifestyles, thought patterns, behaviors, and interests, etc. When people love any of these more than the pursuit of godliness they are regarded as worldly. Unfortunately, the fall of the first couple because of sin has brought humanity under the power of worldliness or worldly attractions, shown in three main areas of lust: *money*, *sex*, and *power*. Thus, worldliness is a challenge to all Christians, especially the immature and those who are still learning to mature. This is because worldliness has become a difficult challenge that opposes a Christian’s ability to succeed in life. Challenges are surmountable, though, yet they can easily prevent victory in life if effective strategies to overcome them are not implemented. The forgoing notwithstanding, the battle against worldliness must be won by Christians to prevent regrettable consequences. Christians, including theology students, are called to imitate Christ by resisting the edge to fall in love with this world. Christ overcame Satan’s temptations with the truth and power of God’s word, after fasting and praying. If Jesus’ obedience to God enabled Him to triumph over worldly pleasures, we can also overcome by following His steps.

Key Words/Concepts: Worldliness/worldly, challenge, lust, money, sex, power and Christian maturity.

## Introduction

Treasures of Christ Youth Ministry (TOCYM) is a youth-based Christian and theological group on the campus of Ghana Christian University College (GhanaCU), Amarahia, Accra. On its third Anniversary celebration in April 2019, TOCYM called for a paper on “Worldliness: A Challenge to a maturing Christian, preacher and/or theologian,” was presented at a symposium that they organized. It is reproduced here for the benefit of the interested reading community. The focus of this paper is not only to present “worldliness” as a threat to the contemporary Christian, but to also discuss how this spiritual canker can be dealt with.

For people who find it difficult to appreciate the beliefs and lifestyles of the Old and New Testament believers, there should not be any sharp distinction between the way of life of believers of those periods and what is expected of present-day believers. Such people may not find specific standards in the practices of people, whether believers or non-believers apart from their connection with, and confession of their faith in God. In other words, some people seem to see no difference between the practices of members in the body of Christ and those who are not. Thus, in terms of lifestyle, it has been observed that there is virtually no difference between those in the church and the world.

However, for those who place emphasis on integrity of lifestyle prescribed by the Bible for Christians, the quality of having strong moral principles is always paramount. Therefore, it should be distinguished from worldliness, which is usually regarded as the pattern and standard of life found among people in the world. Indeed, it is not enough to draw a line between worldly and Christian lifestyles but to also see the challenge the former poses to the latter. Maturing Christians, particularly theology students, are those who are being groomed into Christ-like living, be they lay people or preachers. In some cases, the desire of lay people become so overwhelming to the point that they do not only end up as preachers but also become theologians, because of their deep interest in the studies of the nature of God. Though all Christians may qualify as “theologians” in one sense or another, not all theologians may necessarily be regarded as Christians.

While worldliness poses a real danger to all Christians, the immature ones are those greatly troubled by it. Being regarded as a challenge here means that it has become a contest

or a difficult task that tests or prevents a person's ability to succeed. Though challenges are surmountable (1Cor. 10:13),<sup>1</sup> they can easily prevent one from leading a victorious Christian life. Thus, the battle against worldliness has to be won by every Christian.

### **What does the Bible say about “Worldliness”?**

The word ‘worldly,’ as an adjective, refers to being “concerned with the physical world rather than a spiritual life.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, ‘worldly’ relates to the temporal world. In other words, it is the totality of all the things that go on in the world; the lifestyles, thought-patterns, behaviors, interests, expectations, etc. However, in terms of Scripture, it refers to creation in its sinful and fallen condition as opposed to godly and divine way of life (1John 2:15-16). This means that worldliness is the kind of life in the world as opposed to that in the Kingdom of God or the condition of being concerned or preoccupied with worldly affairs, especially to the neglect of spiritual things.

So, worldliness is depicted as the exact opposite of godliness. For example, in 1Corinthians 3:1-3, the Apostle Paul equates worldliness with spiritual immaturity. Though the material world itself is not sinful, sin resides in the heart of humanity (Matt. 15:19), and following after worldliness is considered as worshipping created things rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:15). When people love the things of this world more than they love God they are regarded as worldly. A closer examination of such texts as Romans 12:2 or 1John 2:15 shows that real worldliness in its essence is an acceptance of the presuppositions of the world. This is the heart of Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:2. After urging his readers not to be conformed to the world, Paul adds that Christians are to be “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind.” Paul, in a manner certainly inconsistent with the anti-intellectual pietism of our day, places the emphasis on “our thinking.”

To love the world, is to be devoid of love for God, and for Akin (2014), “to give ourselves to things that are temporary and transient, things that have no lasting or eternal value.”<sup>3</sup> Usually, lack of maturity leads people to behave as though they were still part of the unsaved world. Little wonder, worldliness at heart is considered to be “nothing less than idolatry.”<sup>4</sup> According to Naselli (2018), Christians are commanded neither to take pleasure in

worldly ways of thinking and acting nor take pleasure in the bad part aspects of culture.<sup>5</sup> This is not in any way supposed to mean that Christians must isolate themselves from the world and engage in ascetism. Boice (2001) was right when he pointed out that to mischaracterize worldliness is to trivialize what is a far more serious and far more subtle problem.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, some have used this to argue for ascetic life, for the Christian.

In the explanation of Clark (2000): Paul has often been misunderstood as teaching asceticism. By careless reading, the word ‘flesh,’ which Paul uses in a derogatory sense, can be mistaken for body, but a little attention to Paul’s remarks makes it clear that he did not mean body, but the sinful human nature inherited from Adam.<sup>7</sup> Paul was not ascetic. He knew how to be abased and how to abound (Phil 4:12).

Christians must not bow to the presuppositions of the world because Christ is not only their Savior but Lord of their intellect. Thus:

Knowledge, for the Christian, is inseparable from Christ and His revelation. When Christians think in a manner inconsistent with these great truths, they are being worldly. It is not to say that worldliness has nothing to do with our outward actions. There are such entities as sins, and Christians, who have been redeemed from sin, are called to walk worthy of this redemption.<sup>8</sup>

### **Some major causes of “Worldliness”**

Morality and ethical issues in ministry usually cover all aspects of a person’s life. Lewis notes: “Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.”<sup>9</sup> The fall of humanity is as a result of sin which by inference from Genesis 3:6 (cf. 1 John 2:15-16) may be classified under three main areas of lust for **money**, **sex**, and **power**. These are considered as the issues that Satan used to cause the fall of the first couple on earth. The situation is not different from what is happening in the Church today.

Thus, the understanding of John’s views on worldliness in his first epistle, 1John 2:15-17, is apt: John describes worldliness as the cravings of our sinful flesh gluttony, sexual perversion, drunkenness, etc.), lust of our eyes (sexual lust, coveting, etc.), and arrogant pride

that causes us to boast in ourselves without ever thanking God.<sup>10</sup> In other words, worldliness primarily takes such forms as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. Akin (2001) argues that “these should not be seen as a comprehensive list of vices. These are avenues by which humanity is especially prone to pervert the goodness of God’s creation.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Bible mentions this in Genesis 3:6:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate (NAS).

The scriptures then condemn and warn believers against any tendencies towards these in 1John 2:15-17:

Do not love the world, or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world ... (NAS)

Clearly, one can make a deduction from the two passages what each vice corresponds to: “delight to the eyes” or “lust of the eyes,” refers to desire or craving for money and material things or possessions; “good for food” or “lust of the flesh,” is desire for sex; while “desirable to make *one* wise” or “the boastful pride of life,” is desire for power, respectively. Theologians and preachers of the Word must consider these areas seriously in their own lives since any compromises or lapses on their part could damage God’s Church and bring the revered Name of God into disrepute. So, let us now consider them in detail: Lust for money; lust for sex; and lust for power.

### **Lust for Money**

In the Old Testament (OT), people like the Priest, Levites, widows, orphans, the needy, and strangers, were assigned special portions of food, meats, offerings, etc. (Num. 28-29; Lev.1-21). The ministers also depended upon the gifts and donations of people (1Sam. 9:7; 1Kings 9:7; 13:3; 2Kings 4:42; 14:3). Apart from the above, some of them, especially the

prophets, most of the time, devised acceptable means to ensure their own survival, e.g., by taking up jobs. A number of the OT priests and prophets like Samuel, Elisha, etc., therefore accepted that they were serving God and His people and not doing the work for money (1Kings 13:8; 2Kings 5:15 –16; 1Sam. 12:3-4). In the NT, Apostle Peter and other apostles refused a cash offer (Acts 8:18-23), and Apostle Paul enumerated some of the difficulties he suffered in the ministry as a leader but never fell to the allure of money (2Cor. 6:3-10).

With time, the solid standards that were set by the men of God began to be corrupted by that of the world. In this context, the world, according to Dodd (1937) “does not mean the created universe, nor the human race...but the life of human society as organized under the power of evil.”<sup>12</sup> This is where worldliness with regard to money sets in. Due to the love of money, lust and greed, some people who could have been used by God fell into punishment. Examples include Balaam (Num. 22:16-17), and Gehazi (2Kings 5:19-20). Some people see the ministry not as a special assignment but only as a means of livelihood (Amaziah; Amos 7:12). A lot of factors have contributed to this:

- Some ministers just compromised the standards and copied the false prophets of the surrounding nations who charged fees for consultation and expected rewards after service (Num. 22:7, 16-22).
- Some of the ministers saw God’s work as a source of income or as a personal property to profit from (Amos 7:12-14).
- Some were prepared to serve only for monetary gains (Num. 22; 1Sam. 12:3-4; 1Kings 13:8; 2Kings 5:15-16).

As a result of these they resorted to dubious means to achieve their aim of making wealth:

- Some used deception and lies (1Kings 5:21-25; Jer. 23:13) or prophesied through divination and sorcery (Num. 24:1; Jer. 23:13).
- Some corrupted God’s word and rendered it of no effect (Jer. 23:17).
- Some promised false hope, peace, and security in order for people to believe in them due to their ulterior motives (Jer. 23:16; 29:11).

According to Micah 3:11, “...The priests were teaching for a price, and [the] prophets were telling fortunes just for money.” Little wonder that the prophets predicted doom for the nation which came to pass within some few years.

**The current fallen standards:** In our contemporary period, the crave for money is worst. The Church is almost engulfed by worldliness for financial gain or for commerce. Some of the causes are as follows:

***Desire for quick money and/or solution to problems:*** The desire for money and the “get-rich-quick” attitude has entrapped a lot of leaders resulting in undesirable consequences such as; selfishness, greed, misappropriation of funds, etc. The situation where Pastors and “overnight prophets” are cashing in on unsuspecting believers in the hope of providing solutions to their problems, has become the order of the day. Unfortunately, some unsuspecting and/or naïve followers have fallen into their trap because they are also looking for quick solutions.

***Operation Toil-and-Enjoy:*** Today, a number of ministers of the Gospel argue that they toiled alone to establish their ministries, so it was now time for them to reap the fruit of their labor. While it is not out of place for people to enjoy from their sweat, the way some of them are abusing God’s property leaves a lot to be desired. More often than not, such decisions lead to negativities like hatred, in-fighting, breaks-up/breakaway cases, even murder, in the Church (James 4:1-3).

***Profit from Church progress:*** While the move of God’s Spirit to win souls from the world into the Kingdom of Heaven leads to the expansion of old churches and the establishment of new ones, some of those involved in the work, particularly leaders, use every opportunity to personalize the material gains from such expansions.

***Fraudulent transactions:*** Currently, what is happening in the arena of a lot of Christian ministries gives major cause for concern. Hardly a day passes without news of prophet ‘A’ ‘B’ or ‘C’ being in the grips of the law for a fraudulent connection involving huge amounts of money, for embezzling church funds, or for other negative practices involving money.

***Exploiting all avenues for monetary benefits:*** Some ministers just create special programs like counseling time, anointing services, special all-night prayer sessions, lengthy fasting periods, etc., where they sell anointing oil of different colors and raise funds with the aim of making money. Presently, it has reached a stage where some ministers even negotiate for payment before they accept preaching appointments.

***Gospel of Prosperity and Materialism:*** There is so much greed and desire for money that sermons are preached to achieve these goal. The messages of such sermons center around people investing in God’s kingdom by sowing seed of money in the hope of

reaping blessings of abundant riches in the form of money, houses, cars, and other material benefits. Succumbing to temptations involving money is becoming a major cause of conflicts and break-ups of churches. All these worldly characteristics are great challenges that should be dealt with.

### **Lust for Sex**

God is very much concerned with the sexual life of humans. He knows that the desire for the opposite sex, no doubt, is one of the most powerful drives in the human body. This is why in His own wisdom, He created mating between man and woman both for pleasure and for procreation. He planned and made it for humanity but He also made rules as to how they should go about it. That is, God allowed sex only within the context of marriage, after He had created a suitable partner for man and had commissioned them into the holy institution of marriage as husband and wife (Gen. 2:20-25).

Thus, He hates fornication and adultery (Heb. 13:4). Consequently, the standard that the true servants of God set was very high: they were sexually moral. Samuel lived in the same Tabernacle with Eli's sons yet did not defile himself with the women that visited the Tabernacle as Eli's sons did (1Sam. 2). Similarly, Elijah, a man of human passion stayed with a widow at Zarephath for three and a half years, and yet did not defile himself with her (1Kings 17:7-24). One would wonder if Elijah was not faced with the temptation for sex during the period of his stay with the widow. He most probably was, because Scriptures say he was a man like us, a person of sensitivity and passion (James 5:17). Yet, there is no record of any wrong-doing to that effect. Again, Elisha stayed in a woman's house without any report of immorality (1Kings 4:8-37). Finally, Paul testified to the high moral life he lived as a believer (Acts 20:18-35).

On the contrary, some of the ministers/prophets were morally weak and fell into sexual immorality. Some of them became deceptive and resorted to prophesying lies (1Kings 5:21-25; Jer. 14:14); employing divination (Jer. 23:13; Num. 24:1); providing false hope and security (Jer. 23:16); and devaluing God's word (Jer. 23:17). Examples are Ahab (son of Kolaiah) and Zedekiah (son of Maaseiah), who were particularly condemned by Prophet Jeremiah (29:20-23). In the process, they incurred God's condemnation and suffered His wrath.



**The current fallen standards:** Many reasons may be advanced for lust for sex among the children of God. Some of the reasons for engaging in these negative practices included the following:

***Uncontrolled fleshly desire for sex:*** A lot of problems of churches in the country today are due to engagements in sexual misconduct such as leaders who sexually abuse people's spouses, various cases of rape or defilement, cases of adultery or fornication, and the like. Currently, reports of sexual misconduct involving hitherto respected ministers of the Gospel, and some supposed men-of-God and church leaders, continue to gain public attention every now and then. Indeed, the air-waves and the newspapers are often filled with them.

Due to such uncontrolled fleshly desires of humanity, as a result of the Fall (Gen. 3:1, 6-7), the drive for sex has become one of the greatest Achilles' heels of Adam's race with very grievous consequences. The Bible has examples of how uncontrolled appetite for sex has caused the downfall of many, including leaders of God's people (Jer. 23:14; 29:20-23):

- The sons of Eli engaged in illicit sex and were punished (1Sam. 2:12).
- The story of King David's illicit sex experience with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and the negative repercussions is told in 1Kings 11-15.
- Some prophets who were among the remnants in Jerusalem (before the Second and Third deportations to Babylon) were guilty of sexual impropriety (Jer. 23:13-15; 29:20-23).

In contemporary Bible Colleges and Seminaries, both confirmed and unconfirmed reports of sexual and other moral misconducts cannot be ruled out. This is to the shame of Christianity because it is disgraceful and embarrassing to mention some of these in public (Eph. 5:11-12).

***Same sex marriage:*** Contrary to God's arrangement for heterosexual marriage, homosexual relationships have currently gained grounds in the modern world. Christendom is shocked by the news that some priests of some denominations, particularly in the Western world are blessing gay marriages and calling for their legalization by the state. The situation is so alarming that some public authorities are appealing to Christians to rise up to the challenge. For example, the *Daily Graphic*, a Ghanaian newspaper, reported the following:

Okatakyie Dr. Amenfi VII, Omanhene of Asebu Traditional Area, has appealed to Christians to help fight anti-social activities such as homosexuality and lesbianism in the society. The Omanhene said Christians were regarded as the light of the world for which it was incumbent on them to check things which Christ abhorred.<sup>13</sup>

### **Lust for Power**

Some of the biblical characters who became God's transformational agents were prepared and raised by God to leadership positions in order to become more effective. Characters such as Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Paul, are a few that might be listed as typical examples of people that God raised to positions of transformation. Because of such a galaxy of faithful leaders, some people think that they can only serve effectively when they are in leadership capacities. God has set standards where He promotes and demotes even though there is nothing wrong when a person aspires for leadership.

Through the Bible times and now, some people's aspirations for leadership are mischievous, and are usually executed through worldly methods that conflict with God's standards. Indeed, many people fail to consider the huge responsibility that falls on the shoulders of those that accept to be God's spokespersons. While some people like Moses and Jeremiah weighed the 'call' and tried to give excuses in order to run away from such divine commission, others rather choose to be leaders with evil and ambitious motives.

Their objectives included desire for power that would catapult them to fame within the shortest possible time. Some of the ministers fell for recognition and power: Miriam and Aaron attacked Moses (Num. 12), Zedekiah stood against Micaiah (1Kings 22), and Hananiah opposed and displayed undue authority before Jeremiah (Jer. 28:1ff), but there is no indication that Daniel undermined anybody to gain any advantage or promotion.

**The current fallen standards:** The church is becoming full of power drunk leaders and even members cannot be left out of the count. Some of the reasons for pursuing power include the following:

***Desire for Fame (Power Struggle):*** In the biblical days, there were some characters who were guilty of being power-drunk. One of the main reasons people seek power is uncontrolled desire for fame or recognition. For example,

- Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses and claimed equality (Num. 12:1ff).
- Korah and followers opposed Moses because they desired power (Num. 16:1ff).
- Prophet Micaiah was opposed by Zedekiah (1Kings 22:1ff).
- Prophet Jeremiah was opposed by Hananiah (Jer. 28).
- Even the disciples of Jesus at a point in time struggled for leadership until Jesus rebuked and corrected them (Matt. 18:1).

Like the biblical days, the desire for power in our contemporary period is quite excessive. This is why it is common nowadays to see people fighting for power/position. This usually leads to internal struggle, conflict of interest, oppositions against the leadership, and sometimes misunderstanding among members of the leadership, etc.

***Leadership insecurity:*** A lot of leaders create problems because they want to take the church as their personal property. No doubt, some hold on to their post because of insecurity, i.e., “what will happen if I lose my job?” or “I have put in too much to let go,” or for fear of exposure after leaving office, etc.

***Nepotism in the Church:*** This is the system whereby people, particularly those in leadership positions, grant special favors to members of their families or close relatives by appointing them to some important offices or to perform certain roles against more qualified persons. The Bible has examples of such a practice which usually runs contrary to the plan of God. King Saul of the United Nation of Israel wanted to engage in this practice. He was bent on ensuring that his son Jonathan succeeds him as King against God’s perfect choice of David.

***Envy and Hatred:*** Once again, David's rise and King Saul's growing jealousy recorded in the scriptures is a typical example. Consequently, a greater period of King Saul’s reign was spent chasing after David to destroy him. Seven and half years after King Saul’s death there existed in Israel two rival kingdoms; that of David's and Saul's house which led into a tribal war (2Sam. 2:2-3:39).

***Persecution of Perceived Enemies:*** There are many persecutions, suppressive, and oppressive treatments that some superiors or leaders mete out to their subordinates. A typical example is the treatment that King Solomon gave to Jeroboam and the workers

in Israel leading to the division of the United Kingdom of Israel into two. The nation of Israel never regained its glorious days of King David and Solomon after its split. The two sister kingdoms that emerged were later subdued and taken into captivity. Indeed, “every kingdom divided against self cannot stand” (Matt. 12:25; cf. Mark 3:24; Luke 11:17).

***Lack of Ministerial Call:*** There are lots of people, (e.g., school dropouts), who have only entered ministry because they see it as an option to make living. Such people have no evidence of God’s call or the requisite qualification and would never attempt to have. Such people, in order to wield some power that will make them famous, will obviously mix ministerial practices with some practices of the world. The “world” indicated here, as also mentioned in James 4:4 (cf. 1John 5:19), according to Johnson, “is Satan’s domain; it is in the control of the evil one.”<sup>14</sup> The results are anybody’s guess. This is not healthy for the Church and contributes to the negative practices around.

***Wrong Motives:*** Some people become leaders because of desire for self-glory and honor or bloated self-confidence and not because they are qualified for service at that level. This observation stems from statements like: “I only can do it” or “I want people to know I am somebody,” which some people usually make. Thus, one can easily conclude that some people accept leadership roles not because of genuine desire for service but because of some benefits, privileges and recognition that they are likely to enjoy (Num. 12:1-9).

***Undue Pressure:*** Unnecessary pressures from within and without, i.e., from groups like spouses, parents, friends (peers), followers (congregation), etc., might cause a lot of Christians to engage in all sorts of vices to the detriment of the lives, the Church and in the long run bring disgrace to the revered name of the Most High God.

***Modernism and Craze for Fashion:*** Compromise and unnecessary copying of worldly standards have led to very distasteful ways of dressing. For the women, we have cases of what is called “I’m aware” and “show your breast,” etc. In the men, one of the dress-codes is “Otto Fister.” These examples of worldliness have become a huge challenge to the Church in modern times.

### **Biblical figures who were punished by God for indulging in Worldliness**

The consequences of involving in worldliness are many. As a sequel to the unacceptable lifestyle and clear compromise of their call to serve God and the covenant community, God subjected them to some punishments. Though the effects of worldliness are devastating with abundant troubles from the examples mentioned, yet a lot of present-day believers including theologians have still not learned any lesson. To this end quite a lot of past and present leaders of churches should be ashamed for just watching the Church being swallowed up by worldliness. The Bible is replete of a number of personalities who fell short of the standards God expected of them and as a result came under the wrath of God. A few of them are considered subsequently:

- In the Old Testament, Gehazi, the servant of Prophet Elisha, is a typical example of how money could lure a person to destruction. He became leprous (2Kings 5:1-27).
- Hananiah, Zedekiah and Ahab are typical examples of how false ministers were punished by God. Hananiah died within two months of prophesying falsehood (Jer. 28), while Zedekiah and Ahab were burned by King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 29:21-23).
- The case of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) is a reminder of how the Holy Spirit frowns on deceit for financial gains and selfish interest. They died for speaking lies.
- Two sons of Jacob murdered some Shechem and his townsmen because their prince (also called Shechem) lusted after and raped Dina, Jacob's daughter (Gen. 34: 1-31).
- Twenty-four thousand (24,000) strong men of Israel died of a plague from God because they lusted after Moabite and Midianite women, against the Sinaitic covenant stipulations (Num. 25:1-9; cf. Deut. 7:1-3).
- Reuben, the first son of Jacob, who was entitled to a double-portion of the father's blessings lost it because of uncontrolled sex (Gen. 49:3-4).
- As a result of King David's illicit sex experience with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, he suffered the following repercussions (1Kings 11-15):
  - i. He suffered Prophet Nathan's rebuke.
  - ii. The son born from his affair with Bathsheba died as a result.
  - iii. His son, Amnon, raped his half-sister, and consequently, Absalom, Tamar's brother and a son of David, murdered Amnon.
  - iv. Absalom usurped his father's throne and the king had to run for his life.

v. Later, Absalom engaged in sex orgies with the concubines of his father.

All these troubles came upon King David and caused major cracks to his kingdom because of illicit sex.

### **Why is worldliness a challenge to the maturing Christian?**

The occurrence of worldliness appears to be ubiquitous. Not being prepared to seriously consider the current challenges in order to address them is a negative attitude that should be avoided by transformational leaders, especially those who want to see church growth.

**Love of Believers growing Cold:** When the love of people for God or the things which are connected to the ministry of God grow cold, they become spiritually apathetic. In such cases, their attention is directed from the things of God which should have been their priority to other things of less importance. The worse situation is when they begin to devote their love for worldliness Johnson<sup>15</sup> observes that “Loving God and loving the world, in a sense, are mutually exclusive.” This note is explained by Adeyemo<sup>16</sup> thus: “The world is in opposition to the Father, and therefore one has to choose which one of them to love; one cannot love both. Moreover, the things of the world all come from a source that is opposed to God.”

Sometimes, there is a show of lack of integrity in whatever they do. Like the High Priest Eli who did not do much to restrain his sons even after God had warned him (1Sam. 3:13-14), a lot of people in responsible position who could be mouth-pieces of God against the vices in His house are doing very little making them equally guilty before God. Such a practice by some priest in the Old Testament period was revealed by Prophet Jeremiah (23:10ff).

**Seeing Service to God principally as a means to carnal living:** Just as in the period of the Judges, where some Priests and Levites were hired by individuals to serve them instead of God, some engaged in idol worship (Judges 17); some of them took concubines (Judges 19:1); some were guilty of theft from God’s offerings and sacrifices and engaged in prostitution with women in the tabernacle (1Sam. 1:12-17, 22; 2:27-36);

even so has the practice gripped some upcoming Theologians, and not even sparing the top hierarchy of some churches.

Thus, some theologians face all the dangers and the punishment God meted to some of the biblical theologians who failed to overcome the cancer of worldliness if; 1) they also fall into the same soup; 2) They fail to confront these challenges; 3) they fail to brace themselves up to the challenge. Indeed, there is need for integrity of the message because Preachers are urged to do what is appropriate in pulpit ministry; “to show ourselves approved unto God” (2Tim. 2:15). The sooner leaders of the Church accepted the challenge to purge her of the present state of unprecedented worldly practices the better for them and, most especially, the younger generation.

### **How Bible-Believers should deal with worldliness**

The Bible has a lot to say about worldliness (1Peter 1:13-14; 2:10-11; 4:12; Luke 16:11). Indeed, we are admonished not to trust things that can cause you harm in the future but rather put your trust in the Lord alone (Prov. 11:28; Matt. 6:19; 1Tim. 6:9). The reason is that it will not profit anyone in the end (Luke 9:25; 1John 2:17). We are not to envy people of the world and their lifestyle (Prov. 23:17; 24:1-2), for their hearts plot violence, and their words always stir up trouble. Rather, we are to put our focus on what really matters (Col. 3:2; Phil. 4:8), and make every effort to walk in the Spirit, and not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

### **A. A Case Study of Daniel**

The moral qualities of Daniel were so exceptional that at a point in time when his detractors were looking for opportunity to pin him to an unethical behavior, they found none. Though some might conjecture that his situation as a possible eunuch is an advantage for insensitivity towards sex, his innocence with regards to money and struggle for power is not in doubt. In their disappointment, they decided to kick against Daniel’s very foundation for his excellent life and performance. They plotted to trap him with a bait he would not be able to resist; his dependence on God (Dan. 6:3-5). That is, if he did communicate with his God instead of the ‘king’ of Babylon he would be punished.

Though Daniel was caught and punished because he could not compromise his faith and resist engaging God in worship, his faithfulness paid off. His ethically ‘pure’ life and his devotion to God in righteousness became his strong defense. Indeed, the lives of biblical

characters like Samuel (1Sam. 12:1-5), and Paul (Acts 20:26-31) teach that integrity in character is a strong defense for every minister of God.

## **B. Admonition from Scriptures**

Scripture admonishes that the personal character of a believer who is a preacher should be above reproach. Matthew 4:2-11 reveals how Jesus' love for God, the Father, triumphed over the temptations for worldly power and pleasures. That is, the one should have sincere love for the Lord, good reputation among people, live exemplary life, show honesty in all forms of business, be truthfulness in speech, should possess wholeness of mind, be considerate in temper, demonstrate righteousness and godliness of character (1Tim. 3:1, 2; 3:7; 4:16; Titus 2:9-12; 1Peter 2:11-16; Psalm 15:1-5).

Worldliness is observed in the speech of people (1John 4:5). While people of the world have a different kind of speech, the speech of those who are called by God is seasoned with salt and are words of faith, encouragement, and hope. Scripture says we must mature in the faith, growing up in all things in Christ so that we are no longer spiritual infants, tossed about by the lies of the world (Eph. 4:14-15). Indeed, Christians must mature in the faith, growing up in all things in Christ so that we are no longer spiritual infants, tossed about by the lies of the world.

Apostle Paul is led by the Holy Spirit to advise Christians on how to treat our fleshly desires that draw us into worldliness: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The reason is that worldly things will cause Christians to lose his/her desire and passion for the Lord. Let us not forget about the seeds that fell among the thorns which represent "those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life."

We should never forget that God can sometimes bless people in certain areas so they can in return bless others. Therefore, we should desire to use our worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Luke 11:41 says: "A generous person will be enriched, and the one who provides water for others will himself be satisfied." If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you will not be honest with greater responsibilities (Luke 16:9-10).

We are warned of the dangers involved in participating in the things of the world. The Scriptures say concerning our previous lives: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to



have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, reveling, and abominable idolatries (1Peter 4:3). However, now, our story is different. Apostle Paul in Romans 13:13 (cf. Eph. 5:11) says: “Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness.”

In applying 1John 2:15-17 to our everyday lives today, I agree with Naselli<sup>17</sup> on some of the questions we should be asking ourselves. These include the following:

- Do you think of sex as something beautiful and sacred that God created exclusively for a husband and wife, or just for fun as the world thinks about it?
- Do you mindlessly scroll through and absorb social media and thus let the anti-God culture constantly influence how you think about relationships and money and material possessions and social status and celebrities?
- When you have some free time, is your habit to spend that time entertaining yourself rather than doing something more edifying?
- Do you buy the world’s lie that life is all about you, that what matters most is that you do what’s best for you, that you should “follow your heart” and “believe in yourself” as you selfishly pursue your dreams?

Some pertinent questions that might be considered here:

- Should we sit down for the situation to completely deteriorate? No!
- Are there some remedies to the situation? Yes!
- At what level should believers rise and arrest the situation? It has to be now, and it must be done by any believer of Christ who has noticed these corruptions in the Church. This can be done through the following:

**Intense Prayer backed by fasting is needed:** There should be special times of long and intensive prayer against Satan and the forces behind these acts of worldliness. Christ overcame Satan’s temptations with the truth of God’s word after fasting and prayers. Therefore, the Lord has given believers power over his works by using the same weapons (Mark 9:29; Luke 10:19).

**Trainees for God’s service should be champions of change:** The schools of the prophets that were set up in places like Jericho, Bethel, Gilgal, Samaria, etc. (2Kings 2:3) were able to effect transformation in Israel. The young prophets were faced with the task of shaping their moral life and that of the people. In some cases, the people rejected their messages or mis-

understood them, some faced persecutions from ungodly leaders, some were executed, some faced opposition from false prophets, they lost favor with the people, etc. They faced the challenge of money, sex, and power, and the challenge to compromise their high moral standards. Yet, many of them stood their grounds, and even opposed powerful leaders. Yes, they made impact:

- They became the measuring rod/ and a check on the people.
- They became the true guides of the kings and the people of Israel.
- They were able to shape the life-style of the whole nation.

Similarly, theological institutions must not just churn out graduates unto the field of ministry but must produce transformational ministers who will be able affect their communities effectively.

**Theologians everywhere should be involved in the crusade:** That is, all theologians should be able to overcome any “holier than thou” attitude and free themselves from the grip of any apathetic spirit, and get involved in addressing the issues of worldliness. There should be deliberate efforts to address these issues at church services, Christian seminars, etc. We should not be ashamed to speak against the rots in the society.

**We should value the ethics of God’s ministry:** Ethics has to do with appropriate behavior or accepted norms of a profession. It is imperative for people to weigh their position as leaders in the light of responsibilities more than privileges. The church/theologian must be able to live above reproach; “those who live in glass houses cannot throw stones.” John 15:19 (cf. 17:15) argues that we are to be in the world but we are not of it. At the end of his ministry, Prophet Samuel said, “Here I stand. Testify against me...if I have wronged anybody...” (1Sam. 12:3-4). In Acts 20:34-35, Apostle Paul boldly declared, “You know the kind of life I have led...” Such declarations should stimulate Christians and theological students to live above reproach and set themselves as examples for others to emulate.

**Theologians should be their brothers’ keeper:** God’s word says, “Iron sharpens iron...” (Prov. 27:17). Thus, any sensitive theologian should be able to gather extreme boldness to approach a fellow who is caught up in worldliness and in the spirit of Christian love restore this person. Galatians 6:2 says we should bear each other’s burden.

**Boldness is needed to confront all negativities:** Are there upcoming theological students with the spirit of boldness to confront the current corruption as Phinehas did in Numbers 25:6-11 which turned the wrath of God away from destroying His people who were involved in immorality? Apostle John advises that Christians are not called to retreat from the world,

rather though they live in it they are not to love it either (1John 2:15). Upcoming theologians should be able to confront the corruptions and worldliness which is engulfing the church boldly. While this world is passing away, those who love God and do His will enjoy eternal life (1John 2:17). Therefore, we are exhorted by Romans 12:2 we are not to conform to worldly standards but to be transformed by God's Word. This is a call for people to be provoked to confront sin head-on. Let us consider the following questions:

- Are there honest students in theological training institutions like those in the days of Prophet Samuel who are prepared to confront the challenges of their time?
- Are there students in theological training institutions with power and passion like Prophet Micah to engage a socio-spiritual revolution now?
- Are there theology students like Apostle Paul who are filled with zeal and knowledge to challenge the charlatans in the ministry now?

**We should hold on to the message of truth:** To the upcoming theologian, the desire to preach with integrity and not for selfish gain should be the watchword and the clarion call. As summed up in Apostle Paul's message to Timothy: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching...Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1Tim 4:13-16; NIV). Indeed, the aim (objective, character, form or nature) of the message should be planned and prepared towards achieving the following:

- Inform and also educate our audience.
- Challenge and enforce God's will in our audience to act positively.
- Inspire and confront our audience in order to reform and transform them.

It should be realized that preaching is not just a demonstration of oratorical skills, nevertheless, adequate communication skills is advantageous for maximum impact. This include observing the following:

- Preach the Word (not just a message): "I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching" (2Tim. 4:1-2).
- Preach Christ: We don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake." (2Cor.

4:5; NLT). Speak the truth, even if it hurts. “Rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard your youthfulness” (Titus 2:11-15).

The preacher must endeavor to be expositively focused, by trying to analyze the words in the hope of providing adequate and educative information and in so doing generate transformation. This can be achieved by assembling and contacting good resources to ensure adequate preparation. Moreover, the one should be able to employ appropriate examples and/or illustrations supported by good gestures and eye contact to ensure effective delivery. In the long run, the ultimate desire of the preacher is to be able to challenge the audience to a life of transformation, while we trust the Holy Spirit to do the conviction.

## Conclusion

Christians are called to imitate Christ by refusing to fall in love with this world. Christ responded to Satan’s temptations with the truth of God’s word and refused to obey him. Jesus’ love for God, the Father, enabled Him to triumph over the temptations for worldly power and pleasures. Christians and theology students are not called to retreat from the world, but they are not to love it either. While this world is passing away, those who love God and do His will enjoy eternal life. That is, though we are in the world, but we are not of it. Therefore, we are exhorted not to conform to worldly standards but to be transformed by God’s Word through the renewal of our mind. We should be prepared to accept the challenge to overcome worldliness. God is looking up to us for action and we cannot afford to fail Him. Great reward awaits anybody who will rise for God. I hope and pray that God will help us to uproot any traits of worldliness from the Church.

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