



## IMMORALITY IN CHURCHES: ISSUES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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### ABSTRACT

The church is deemed a sacred place and a source of example for biblical principles and practices that glorify God. It is apparent that immorality among Christians in churches is on the rise despite the proliferation of churches and preachings, teachings and godly counsels by men and women of God on numerous social media platforms as well as in-person or physical spaces. These efforts are supposed to shape the moral lifestyles of followers of Christ as Christians described as the light of the world are but we seem to be failing as a church. There are issues of fornication, abortion, adultery, embezzlement, polygamy among others that are being speculated about the church. These issues cannot help their church to achieve its great commission enshrined in Mathew 28: 16-20. These have raised the curiosity of the researcher to delve into this topic and unveil where exactly the church is failing

and how society thinks about the church currently. James 3:11 states 'can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?'. This gives us a cause to consciously discipline ourselves wherever we are so that we can reflect Christ as society expects of us. Christians misconduct among believers is catastrophic to souls. The researcher will look at definition of terms, some immoral practices in the church, what the causes are, and what we can do to salvage the situation. He will use questionnaire and observation method as his research methodology. The researcher will conclude by giving conclusion and recommendations.

## INTRODUCTION

It is crucial for the church to recognize that addressing immorality requires not only recognizing the immoral acts, and understanding its causes but also implementing practical solutions. Ryg Angie (2016) posits three ways to address immorality in the church. These are: 'STOP the sin, DROP the charade, ROLL away from sin' A safe and supportive environment should be created where individuals feel comfortable addressing their struggles and seeking help. The church should establish accountability structures that hold its leaders and members responsible for their actions, ensuring that there are consequences for immoral behaviour. By actively working towards these goals, the church can truly become a transformative force in society, promoting righteousness and inspiring individuals to live lives of integrity. V. Jean

Marie (2024), indicates that 'the Church can first purge itself of all immoral actors within their own midst. So, the Catholic Church would full-on expel and excommunicate all pedophile priests.' The church is often regarded as a sacred institution that upholds moral values and promotes spiritual growth. However, when immorality seeps into this sanctified space, the consequences can prove to be severely detrimental to the faithful and the broader societal fabric.

Immorality within the church can lead to a rapid erosion of trust, as congregants see their spiritual leaders failing to embody the values they are entrusted to uphold. The revelation of scandals involving sexual abuse, financial improprieties, or other immoral behaviors significantly undermines the credibility and integrity of the entire church body. Congregants may experience disillusionment and skepticism towards religious institutions, which ultimately hampers their ability to find solace and inspiration within that community. When immorality permeates the church, the spiritual vitality and growth of its members are profoundly affected. Moral failings

among church leaders can create an atmosphere of scepticism and doubt, leading to decreased engagement in worship, prayer, and other spiritual practices. The focus of the faith community may shift from nurturing the souls of believers to dealing with the fallout of immorality, thereby stifling their spiritual development. Thus, this article aims to critically explore the effects of immorality in the church, addressing the erosion of trust, decline in spiritual vitality, alienation of believers, societal disillusionment, and the erosion of the church's moral authority.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Church

Britanica (2023) explains that 'the Greek word *ekklēsia*, which came to mean church, was originally applied in the Classical period to an official assembly of citizens. *ekklēsia* is used for the general assembly of the Jewish people, especially when gathered for a religious purpose such as hearing the Law'. Verlade R. (2009) indicates that the church is not a building, but a body of believers with a specific nature and purpose. M. Fairchild (2019) consolidated this by indicating that The New Testament church is a body of believers that has been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ. V. K Ahamakah V. 2023, cited McCallum, D & DeLashmutt, G. 2023, argues that the word 'ekklesia' means 'the called-out ones.' They further argue that the word 'church' is rather from the word 'kuriakon' which means 'dedicated to the Lord'. They further indicated that:

the word church is a poor translation of the word *ekklesia* since it implies a sacred building, or temple. A more accurate translation would be "assembly" because the term *ekklesia* was used to refer to a group of people who had been called out to a meeting. It was also used as a synonym for the word *synagogue*, which also means to "come together."

### Immorality

Angie (2016) indicates that 'sexual sin is something that many people do not talk about because of the personal stigma attached to it. Sexual sin can include a list of

various sins: adultery, fornication before marriage, lust, etc. Because it seems to be a more secret sin, the enemy makes the lies of temptation very easy to rationalize away'. U. Ngohi Bukar, et.al (2020) indicate that morality may vary from one culture or tradition to another; however, it generally relates to the principles of right and wrong conducts religiously, socially and otherwise. Immorality as behavior or action that is morally wrong (Summers, 2001 cited in Obichukwu et al, 2020). Obichukwu K.O, Okafor E.I & Okolo R.N, (2020) indicate that morality is connected to the principles of the right and wrong, good and bad. When an action complies to accepted standards of the laid down rules, it is deemed morally acceptable

### **CAUSES OF IMMORALITY IN THE CHURCH**

The church, as an institution dedicated to fostering moral values and spiritual growth, has sometimes found itself plagued by instances of immorality. Despite its noble mission, moral lapses within the church have raised concerns and speculation among scholars and believers alike. Understanding the complex causes behind this phenomenon requires a holistic analysis that takes into account theological, sociocultural, and psychological factors. Oyediran A (2020) indicates that Sexual immorality is a worldwide phenomenon and one of the crucial steps towards mitigating this societal ill is to understand the reasons behind it. One contributing factor to immorality within the church lies in the lack of spiritual depth among its members. A shallow understanding of religious principles or an absence of personal engagement with faith renders individuals susceptible to moral compromise. This may result from an overemphasis on rituals or a lack of spiritual guidance and mentorship, thus failing to instil a strong moral foundation. Another significant aspect to consider is the inherent fallibility and weaknesses of human nature. Although individuals may be devoted believers, their tendencies to err or succumb to temptation persist. As members of the larger society, churchgoers are exposed to the same secular influences that challenge their moral integrity, leading to lapses that can be mistakenly attributed solely to the church. Obichukwu, K.O, Okafor, E.I & Okolo, R.N, (2020) stated that

Mixing politics up with religion is always dangerous. With political interest in any religious undertaking a lot of moral weaknesses are obvious. When the church leaders and agents negotiate for political reasons, interest, and relationship it strongly affects their moral standards as Christians. This type of influence is noticed in some church and it introduces band wagon of immoralities to the church.

It is also worth noting that hypocrisy within the church community emerges as a potent cause of immorality. When certain leaders or influential members espouse moral values publicly but engage in immoral conduct privately, it erodes trust and fosters a culture of duplicity. This dissonance can weaken the moral fabric of the entire congregation and contribute to moral lapses as believers question the authenticity of the faith community. Ezenwajiofor, G (2018), indicated that 'Carnal and ungodly pretence of being strong and denying your spouse (1Cor 7:2-5). The church is a place where individuals seek solace, support, and healing. Some respondents in their responses indicated the following as causes of immorality.

- a. societal influence
- b. refusal to obey God's words
- c. financial crisis
- d. avarice
- e. selfishness
- f. members are not engaged more in the church.
- g. Some pastors don't make time for congregants
- h. Power struggle

Ezenwajiofor further enumerated factors as causes of immorality in the church, such as: **a.** looking for deliverance and counseling from ungodly and unrighteous pastors and prayer warriors (Rev.2:20-21); **b.** desperation to get married (Gen 38:12-18); **c.** desperate desire to get children or a male child (Gen 30:1); and **d.** desire to get rich quick or to keep your job or to get promotion (Lev 19:29).

However, if emotional and psychological needs are neglected or left unaddressed, individuals may resort to immoral behavior as a means of coping or seeking fulfillment. The pressures of modern life and experiences of trauma can exacerbate

this issue, requiring the church to place a greater emphasis on holistic support programs. According to Obiefuna and Kanu (2014 cited in Obichukwu et al, 2020), 'the church sets the standards and preaches the essence of sound morality as contained in the gospel. The church preaches the virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work.' However, due to the multifaceted nature of religious texts, divergent interpretations can emerge, leading individuals or groups to adopt distorted understandings of moral teachings. Misinterpretations can create ethical grey areas that blur the line between right and wrong, enabling immorality to take root. Obichukwu et al, (2020) consolidated this by explaining that 'heresy is very dangerous to the wellbeing of the church because it exists within the church, and in many forms. Therefore, tackling the cankerworm is always very difficult and sensitive, moreover, it is very difficult to notice.' Encouraging scriptural literacy and providing proper theological education within the church can help mitigate this risk. Churches are not immune to the pervasive influence of social, cultural, and historical contexts. Societal norms, prevalent

vices, or prevailing moral relativism can infiltrate congregations, gradually giving rise to immoral behavior. Moreover, historical experiences and consequences of discrimination or marginalization can engender resentment or disillusionment that affects the church's ethical fabric. Deepening our understanding of the causes of immorality in the church is fundamental to addressing this complex issue. By grappling with the factors discussed above, such as the lack of spiritual depth, human weaknesses, hypocrisy, unaddressed emotional needs, misinterpretations of scripture, and cultural influences, the church can fortify its moral foundation. This necessitates a collective effort involving church leaders, theologians, and believers to promote spiritual growth, foster authenticity, expand support systems, ensure scriptural literacy, and navigate cultural challenges. Only then can the church fulfill its mission as a beacon of moral guidance and inspire individuals to lead noble lives within and beyond its walls.

### **SOME IMMORAL PRACTICES IN THE CHURCH**

Over the years, places of worship have stood as beacons of moral guidance and spiritual solace for individuals seeking faith, hope, and community. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that even within such revered institutions, immoral practices can emerge, causing significant harm to both followers and the reputation of the church. The researcher has identified several immoral practices prevalent in some

churches. Some of these in financial exploitation. Obichukwu, K.O, et.al (2020) indicated that:

Presently other dimensions of immoralities are observed in the church. Leaders of various churches convert the church wealth for personal possessions, both the leader and the led are involved, so many sinful acts like; drug trafficking, sex with under-age, adultery, false preaching for personal gains, abortion, business malpractices, breach of contract, and other criminalities and violent offences are done by Christians.

In some instances, religious leaders misappropriate funds intended for charitable works or necessary church expenses. Such actions betray the trust of their congregants and deprive worthy causes of the vital resources they need to thrive. This deviation from ethical standards not only undermines the church's mission of spreading goodwill but also tarnishes its reputation, potentially leading to a decline in the overall faith community.

Sexual misconduct and abuse within churches are grave moral violations that deeply affect individuals, families, and entire communities. Cases of clergy exploiting their position of power by engaging in inappropriate relationships or committing acts of abuse have come to light in recent years. These immoral actions not only betray the trust of their followers but also inflict long-lasting emotional and psychological trauma on victims. To address this issue, proper background checks, transparency, and clear reporting mechanisms are crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of churchgoers.

Additionally, discrimination and intolerance are noted immoral practices in Churches, which often preach love, acceptance, and inclusivity, are sadly not immune to discrimination and intolerance. Immoral practices of excluding individuals based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation go against the spirit of universal understanding and compassion that religious institutions generally uphold. Creating an environment that perpetuates prejudice weakens the core values of a church and impedes its ability to foster a sense of belonging and spiritual growth for all individuals.

Another immoral practice in churches is spiritual manipulation and abuse. While spiritual guidance is a fundamental aspect of churches, some leaders may exploit

their influence by engaging in manipulative practices. Coercing followers to blindly follow their directives or using fear tactics to maintain control can lead to spiritual abuse. This immoral behaviour

diminishes the autonomy and free will of individuals, compromising their capacity to make informed choices and engage in healthy spiritual growth. Obichukwu, K.O et al, (2020) It is essential for churches to foster a nurturing environment that prioritizes the well-being and personal growth of their congregants. An additional immoral practice observed in certain churches involves the lack of transparency and accountability. When leaders and administrators operate without oversight and dodge accountability for their actions, it erodes trust and enables potential corruption. A church can only remain true to its moral compass and garner respect by implementing robust governance structures, encouraging transparency in decision-making processes, and providing mechanisms for reporting and addressing concerns. Religious institutions should embody the highest moral values and serve as models of ethical conduct. However, immoral practices such as financial exploitation, sexual misconduct, discrimination, spiritual abuse, and lack of transparency can undermine the noble purpose of churches. By remaining vigilant, empowering congregants, and holding leaders accountable, churches can work towards eliminating these immoral practices, fostering a safe and nurturing environment for spiritual growth and more effectively fulfilling their role in society.

### **EFFECTS OF IMMORALITY ON THE CHURCH**

Immorality within the church can also result in the alienation of faithful believers. Those who feel conflicted or appalled by the immoral behaviors of their leaders or fellow congregants may distance themselves from the church or even lose faith altogether. This sense of alienation leaves believers feeling isolated, disconnected, and betrayed, often resulting in a fragmented and weakened faith community. Ezenwajiofor, G (2018), indicated that the devil is using sexual immorality to weaken the church. The presence of immorality in the church negatively impacts society beyond the walls of faith communities. Scandals and rampant immorality can lead to public disillusionment and contempt towards religious institutions. Society may cast a sceptical eye on the church, branding it as hypocritical and out of touch. Such disillusionment can contribute to a decline in societal moral values and distort public perception of religion, leading to a wider erosion of trust in religious institutions. The perpetuation of immorality within the church significantly undermines its moral



authority both within and outside religious circles. Ezenwajiofor, G (2018) mentioned that the consequences of immorality include:

1. It destroyed our relationship with God and with our spouse.
2. It renders you useless in the kingdom of God.
3. It removes the grace of God and anointing of the Holy Ghost.
4. It removes your name from the book of life.
5. It brings shame, guilt and condemnation.
6. It makes you lose your value and voice and vitality.
7. It brings upon you the wrath and the judgment of God.
8. It exposes you to the attack and oppression of the devil.
9. It brings you into bondage.
10. It will damn your soul in hellfire throughout eternity if un-repented of.

As the church fails to uphold its own moral standards, it loses its ability to provide ethical guidance and moral instruction to its members and the wider community. The erosion of moral authority negatively impacts individuals who may seek guidance during moments of personal crisis or societal challenges, resulting in a diminished role for the church in shaping ethical behaviour and moral decision-making. The insidious effects of immorality within the church are extensive and far-reaching, impacting the lives of believers, faith communities, and society as a whole. Erosion of trust, decline in spiritual vitality, alienation of believers, societal disillusionment, and the erosion of moral authority are among the deeply concerning consequences. Ogundele-Jesu T. (2019) indicated that loss of respect and prestige, shame, disgrace and punishment, have become devil's emissary or agent and servant among others are the consequences of immorality. It is crucial for religious leaders and congregants to confront and address immoral behaviour promptly, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and a commitment to upholding the values that the church stands for. Doing so will ensure that the church remains a beacon of moral guidance, enabling the spiritual growth and well-being of its members while preserving its credibility within the broader societal fabric.

## HOW CAN THE CHURCH SOLVE THIS PROBLEM

Ahamakah (2023) indicated that 'the church also plays a significant role in providing guidance and spiritual leadership, offering pastoral care, and promoting acts of charity and goodwill in the community. Moreover, church goes beyond mere religious obligations and rituals.'

The respondents have indicated some of the ways the church can curb if not eradicate this canker of immorality in the church. A respondent from Global Evangelical Church who is a vocalist indicated that marital processes should be made flexible, teaching on the churches' conducts and codes should be intensified.

Another respondent who is a female and a Catholic and also dabbles as a Sunday school teacher/Children's service indicated that marital processes should be made flexible by the church to curb or eradicate sexual immorality amongst members. She also indicated that churches should stress on their codes of conduct and as well provide guidance and counselling services.

A respondent from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana who serve as a secretary in the church and a respondent from Catholic stated that the church must not relent in teaching God's word accompanied by prayer.

Respondents of Rescuer Temple/ Hall of Strength and Great Commission church respectively indicated that there should be enough education on the need to be morally upright. He added that there should be some form of punishment and restoration processes for those who drift away. They added that churches should organize youth programs for spiritual build up.

Female respondents from Power Embassy and Global Evangelical Church who is a vocalist also indicated that there should be conscientization, teaching of the word of God and youth education, counseling of youths and leaders should lead exemplary lives.

A respondent who is a member of the Lighthouse Chapel International mentioned that the church should be fair and firm in the application of its rules and the church should monitor the conduct of its members at all times. According to Anyacho 2005, as cited in Obichukwu et.al 2020, every programme of the church should be geared towards reproofing, correcting or teaching on how to serve God and humanity with

love. Baba D.E, (2022) indicated that to avoid immorality as an individual in marriage, one has to do these: keep your love affair with Jesus passionate; give a new commitment to early Morning Prayer; be accountable, etc.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researcher used qualitative research and obtained his data from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were gathered from books, and articles, and primary data were collected mainly from the field. Additionally, data and findings of the study were gathered from the field. The data gathered from the field were analyzed critically. The main data collection techniques adopted by the study were questionnaire and observations. The researcher shared questionnaires to twenty-five (25) participants. This includes both males and females who are believers from both orthodox and Charismatic/Pentecostal churches. Leaders of denominations, founders of churches and some congregants are included. Eleven (11) of them are females and fourteen (14) are males with the ages from eighteen (18) to fifty (50). The researcher carefully chose respondents who have good orientation on morality and immorality. The respondents were given ample time understand the questions they were to respond to and the questions are set in simple language.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Education and training programs can be implemented to equip believers with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate ethical dilemmas and make morally sound decisions.
2. Everything the church does should be guided by the scriptures. Once the scriptures become the yardstick of our everyday affairs, it will be difficult to fall prey to temptations.
3. Ecclesiastical leadership should be of concern to churches than selecting people based on social class. Those who are put in leadership should not be chosen due to their financial influence but their commitment to things of the spirit.
4. Churches should stress on eternal salvation other than prosperity messages. When the church focuses more on salvation, followers of Christ will have reasons to live holy lives. This is not to mean that prosperity message in the

church is wrong.

5. There should be periodic conferences on salvation and morality. Churches need to constantly organize conferences on salvation to serve as a reminder of the need to be Godly because the enemy is set against the church and that believers need to guard against things of the world.
6. Ultimately, believers must learn to stay glued to their bible and let the bible be the only standard of their lives. It is only when believers read and meditate on the word of God continually that we can reflect Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher, per his findings, concluded that the church is faced with a lot of challenges that threaten the salvation of souls because of the happenings in the world and the relaxed nature of Christians spiritually. It is observed that some believers are easily swept into the world and begin to engage in immoral acts. However, some of these followers are not ready for rebuke and correction and they are quick to fight ministers and leaders who have the mandate to direct others under the leadership of the holy spirit. It is also established that when the above recommendations are considered, it will help the body of Christ. It is also established that immoral acts are in both the charismatic/Pentecostal as well as orthodox churches and so the church needs to put in much efforts to ensuring high moral standards. To Achieve this, the church must put in measures to constantly preach purity and mortality as captured in the scriptures.

### About The Author



Dr. (Apostle) Venunye Kwaku Ahamakah is a senior High School teacher, and a trained counsellor. He holds a B.A. in Ewe Education with a specialisation in Linguistics and Literature, a B.A. in Christian Ministry and Leadership, a M.A. in Biblical Theology, an Advance Diploma in Applied Biblical Studies and Ministry, an Executive Diploma in Christian Leadership and Biblical Counselling, and a Certificate

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