

# Men Shall Be Lovers of Self, Money and Pleasure (II Timothy 3:2, 4): A Contemporary Discourse on Apostle Paul Prophecy of the End-Time

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## Abstract

*The present time in Nigeria and globally has been more perilous than ever, characterized with bizarre occurrences within the church and the larger society. This study explores the Pauline eschatological prediction of the perilous times when men will become lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure more than God (II Timothy 3:1, 2 & 5). Experiential and theological methodologies were adopted for generating qualitative primary and secondary data. The theological aspect of the research employed the tools of biblical exegesis, textual analysis, and literatures. The experiential aspect involved in-depth interviews (IDIs), observations, social media contents and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) to access current events and personalized experiences of respondents who were purposively selected from within and outside the church. The results were discussed in the light of Christian theology, social ethics and Pastoral ministry. The Nigerian society is evidently witnessing the perilous times when love of self, money and pleasure will become the untoward defining features of human society and sadly too, of men that profess the faith. Transactional gospel, gimmickry, merchandize of holy things, and self-indulgent love of money are rife in the contemporary church. Ostentatious lifestyles, lack of support for the minister at the local church, and false messages on material blessings are what trap church ministers and laypersons in this end-time evil. The context and practice of 'full time' ministry when the local assembly is not able to support its minister is a challenge that predisposes some to 'Simoniacal' presentations, offering the gifts of God for monetary gain. Sound biblical teachings to protect the people of God and expose the mercenary spirit in sacred function is the local church most potent weaponry.*

**Keywords:** Perilous time, Lovers of Self, Lovers of Money, Lovers of Pleasure, Prophecy

## Introduction

Apostle Paul, a writer of thirteen letters in the New Testament as an old man, imprisoned for the second time in the Roman cell, facing imminent and inevitable death was preoccupied with last day's unprecedented evil trends already manifesting around in his time. Therefore, he wondered what would become of those days ahead, especially within the church. He, therefore, in his last letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, by divine inspiration,

made prophetic allusion to the horrific lifestyle and warp mindset that will characterize many people living at the end time (II Timothy 3:1-5).<sup>1</sup> His prophecy contains some eighteen (18) end time evil traits, spiritual and moral decadence that will be manifesting within the church and in the world. At the beginning of this melancholy forecast, we find the leading statement: “For men shall become lovers of self, lovers of money and toward the conclusion he mentions that ... ‘men will become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:1, 5). These are the evil triads of perversion of the true gift of love. This perversion is what undergirds all the other evils of the end time. It is this erroneous prioritizing of pleasure above God that leads to the last in the list of these evils, when ‘men shall have an appearance of godliness and deny the power of God over their lives’ (II Timothy 3:5). The present time in Nigeria and globally has been more perilous than ever in the history of human existence, characterized with unprecedented and strange occurrences within the church and the larger society. In contemporary Nigerian society, wanton killings, suicide bombing, Christian persecutions, corruption in both secular and ecclesiastical leadership, and social upheaval are pervasive and ever increasing.

This study explores the Pauline eschatological prediction of the *καιροὶ χαλεποὶ*—perilous times when men will become lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure more than God (II Timothy 3:1,2,4), and their manifestation on the socio-political, economic and spiritual landscape of modern Nigerian society in the past Ten (10) years. Qualitative data were obtained from relevant biblical textual analysis, related literatures, participant observation, in-depth interview and 2 sessions of Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The Social media contents analyzed covered religious activities in the global Christian community, while the sample populations were drawn from the Nigerian society.

The objective of this study is to bring to the fore some contextual, exegetical significance of this predictions and to discourse the contemporary relevant reconsidering observable end time events using Christian theology and social ethics as parameters. Following these, the Pastoral context for securing the end –time church from this evil triad of ‘love of self, money and pleasure’ is presented.

The following research questions will therefore be investigated in other to achieve the above objectives: What is the exegetical significance of Pauline prediction of men becoming lovers of self, money and pleasure more than God? How does this eschatological position of Apostle Paul play out in contemporary Nigeria and on global scene? What are the dimensions to these end time melancholy forecasts on the church community? And finally, how should the church and individual Christian respond to these evils of the end time?

### **Exegetical Review of II Timothy 3:2, 4**

Apostle Paul’s warning of the evil that will besiege the last days can be seen or interpreted as events that invariably will characterize the entire globe, wherever mankind can be found. The apocalyptic warning focuses on what shall become of ... ‘men’ or ... ‘mankind’- *Anthropos*, or the generality of the human race; within or outside of the church as becoming ... ‘lovers of themselves...unholy...having a form of godliness but denying the power of God thereof’....(II Timothy 3:1-5). The Apostle Paul in this his last letter and legacy not only to his

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Horrell., *Introduction to the Study of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 133-135.

spiritual son, Timothy, but to the body of Christ was consumed and preoccupied with the urgent need of the church to prepare for this end-time calamities as an Apostle of Christ to his church. He saw it as his divinely assigned duty, to warn the church of the coming evils that he had already seen manifesting and festering in the 'latter days' of the end of his own lifetime and of his son-Timothy days. This evil, according to Paul, will intensify in the approaching 'last days' of the church. He listed these corruptions and warned that Timothy, and by extension, the future church of any period, must be wary of and protect itself from them because this corruption will invariably invade and characterize men in the church also. On this, Paul Kretzmann comments, thus:

...In those days there will be upon the Christians dangerous times, characterized not only by a moral degeneracy of the human race in general, but also of the so-called visible Church. Cp. Matt.24, 12. 23.24.<sup>2</sup>

**Text:** II Timothy 3:2

1.) 'For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money...(RSV)

Ἔσονται γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι φίλαυτοι, φιλάργυροι, (Greek Rendition)

The Greek word **Φίλαυτοι** is translated as lovers of self:

'Lovers of their own selves' – **Φίλαυτοι** (*philautos* from *phileo* means have great affection for or be friend to *autos* which means self) is an adjective which means literally loving oneself, selfish, intent on one's own interests or concerned solely with one's own desires, needs, or interests. Only here in the New Testament and not in the Septuagint.<sup>3</sup>

Adam Clarke comments that this implies being selfish, studious of one's own interest, and regardless of the welfare of all mankind."<sup>4</sup>That men will be lovers of self', according to Kretzman, this phrase in the bad sense, connotes egoism and self-centeredness which he refers to as being the main characteristic of men that Apostle Paul is talking about here. And it is this self-love that is causing them to seek only their own advantage and ignoring the needs of their neighbours.<sup>5</sup>Albert Barnes' observes that **Φίλαυτος** does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament and that here as a leading trait of last days features, means a lover of oneself, 'selfish'. He, however, argues that on a healthy and positive note, love of self leads us to secure our salvation, and such love of self is proper. According to Barnes, this love of self, however, as used by Apostle Paul in the text under consideration interferes with the rights and comforts of others; which makes self the central and leading object of living; and which tramples on all that would interfere with that. Barnes surmises that the preponderance of this base, hateful

<sup>2</sup> Paul E. Kretzman, "Commentary of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:2", *Kretzman's Popular Commentary*, Accessed September 27, 2024, <https://www.kretzmannproject.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Austin Precept, "2 Timothy 3:1-2 Commentary", *Precept Austin Verse by Verse Commentary by Book*, Accessed September 26, 2024, [https://www.preceptaustin.org/2\\_timothy31-5](https://www.preceptaustin.org/2_timothy31-5).

<sup>4</sup> Adams Clarke, "2Timothy 3:2 Clarke's Commentary," Accessed September 26, 2024, [https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/2\\_timothy/3.htm](https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/2_timothy/3.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Kretzman, "Commentary of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:2", *Kretzman's Popular Commentary*, Accessed September 27, 2024, <https://www.kretzmannproject.org>.

and narrow passion called love of self, leaves no room for one to doubt the correctness of the prophecy of the Apostle that it would exist 'in the last time'.<sup>6</sup>

The point of the above scholars is that altruism will no longer be found in the disposition of people. Rather, selfishness will invariably become the order of the day. On a practical term, in its most subtle form, being a friend of oneself or lovers of oneself can be seen in society in the character on the road that thinks he owns the entire road and that all must get out of his way.<sup>7</sup>

The 'love of self', being the lead character in this end time evil traits, strongly implies that at the roots of all other dark characters listed as end time feature lies 'love of self or selfishness.

The word **Φιλαργυροι** in the Greek is translated to mean Lovers of money:

Etymologically, **Φιλαργυρος φιλαργυροη** is from **φιλος'αργυρος**, meaning loving money or avaricious.<sup>8</sup> According to Vincent Marvin, **φιλάργυροι** is better translated as 'lovers of money' because love of money, which is from the noun **φιλάργυριά** (as used in I Timothy 6:10) and covetousness, are not synonyms. Covetous is **Πλεονεκτής**.<sup>9</sup> In his submission, however, Paul Kretzman evaluates the end time trait, *Lovers of money they will be*, as synonymous with covetousness which he further describes as 'one form of selfishness'. For these corrupt people, money and wealth being the sum and substance of all happiness to them.<sup>10</sup> Kretzman adds that the second trait 'lovers of money' is more attached to 'love of self' and both twin sisters are inseparably the roots of all other evil traits.<sup>11</sup> Buttressing this salient point further Kretzman opines that:

These two points, however, selfishness and avarice, are the roots from which such a behavior is developed to cause the dissolution of all social relationships. For it follows, first of all, that they become boastfully proud..., are haughty... For which reason the next step is their becoming blasphemers...desecrating everything that is holy.<sup>12</sup>

Mathew Henry corroborating Kretzman compares 'love of self' with 'love of money'. He comments that:

Self-love brings in a long train of sins and mischiefs. When men are lovers of themselves, no good can be expected from them, as all good may be

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<sup>6</sup> Albert Barnes, *2 Timothy 3: Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible*, Accessed September 26, 2024, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/2\\_timothy/3.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/2_timothy/3.htm).

<sup>7</sup> John Wesley, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:2", *John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*, Accessed December 13, 2023, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/wen/2-timothy-3.html.1765>.

<sup>8</sup> Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, Accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/resources/lexical/thayers.cfm>

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Marvin, "2 Timothy 3:2," *Vincent's Word Studies*, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/vws2\\_timothy/3.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/vws2_timothy/3.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Kretzman, "Commentary of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:2," *Kretzman's Popular Commentary*.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Kretzman, "Commentary of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:2," *Kretzman's Popular Commentary*.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Kretzman, "Commentary of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:2," *Kretzman's Popular Commentary*.

expected from those who love God with all their hearts. When covetousness generally prevails, when every man is for what he can get and for keeping what he has, this makes men dangerous to one another and obliges every man to stand on his guard against his neighbor.<sup>13</sup>

In practical sense, in human society today, this does not have to be a deep love for money, as found in the super greedy or avarice society, but it also relates to anyone that has an undue friendship with money.

According to Torrey, many churches are in this boat today as they raise funds and build buildings for the betterment of the institution rather than for the purpose of extending the spiritual kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

### Text: II Timothy 3: 4-5

2.) ...treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, **lovers of pleasure** rather than lovers of God (RSV)

Προδόται προπετεῖς, Τετυφωμένοι, **Φιλήδονοι** μᾶλλονῆ, Φιλόθεοι (Greek Rendition)

**Φιλήδονοι** (*philedonoi*) is the Greek adjective used by Apostle Paul to describe men as 'lovers of pleasure'. It can also mean those who have gratification of the natural desire, "lusts" in KJV (Titus 3:3; James. 4:1, 3).<sup>15</sup> Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:4, used the Greek description of those who choose to love God (**φιλόθεοι**) in contrast to those who choose to love pleasure (**Φιλήδονοι**).<sup>16</sup> We do not have to choose between pleasure and God. Serving God is the ultimate pleasure (Psalm 16:11), but we do have to choose between the *love* of pleasure and the *love* of God.<sup>17</sup> Rick Renner expounds more on μᾶλλονῆ ("more than"):

Paul wrote that people will be lovers of pleasure "more than" lovers of God. The words "more than" are a translation of the Greek word *mallon*, which draws a drastic comparison between two points, denoting something that is *extremely different* in comparison to something else. In context, this means people will be *excessive* lovers of pleasure — *much, much more* than they are lovers of God. In fact, their desire for their own

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<sup>13</sup> Mathew Henry, " Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:2 ," *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* Accessed September 27, 2024,

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/2Ti/2Ti\\_003.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/2Ti/2Ti_003.cfm)

<sup>14</sup> Reuben A. Torrey, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3: 1," *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, Accessed December 22, 2023, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/tsk/2-timothy-3.html>.

<sup>15</sup> A. T. Robertson, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3: 1," *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament* (Broadman press, 1932), 33, Renewal 1960, Accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/rwp/2-timothy-3.html>.

<sup>16</sup> A. T. Robertson, "Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:1," 33.

<sup>17</sup> David Guzik, "Enduring Word Bible Commentary," Accessed January 15, 2024, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/2-timothy-3/>

pleasure will be so great that it will *far surpass* their devotion, respect, and service to God.<sup>18</sup>

### **A Theological Assessment of the Evidence for the Last Days' Vices, the Evil Triad- "Love of Self, Money and Pleasure," in Nigerian Society and Global Christian Community**

Here, the primary focus is on the phenomena that are evidenced in last day's corruption of human society, prophesied by Apostle Paul in II Timothy 3:2&4. These will be identified as they play out in modern Nigerian society and the global Christian community. Theological evaluation of these unethical occurrences and antithetical disposition of men within and outside the church are attempted below. The understanding derived from their contextual and exegetical analysis above shall be applied in the following discussion.

#### **'Men shall be lovers of themselves, lovers of money or covetous'—II Timothy 3:2**

Misplacement of priority in putting self and mammon at the central stage of an individual life is the manifestation of the above prediction. The broad theme of misplaced priority is what captures this love of self and love of money. It is striking and instructive that 'love for self' is listed first in the categories of these vices that will characterize men in the last days. Love for self implies that self is the only object of affection and affinity excluding others, where altruism is no longer the goal. This is what is known generally as selfishness, self-centeredness and egoism. Apostle Paul, by divine revelation well located this corruption of human heart as the first and harbinger of other evils that follow in the list. The second vice that follows immediately is 'love of money' which he had earlier in I Timothy 6:10 described as 'the root of all evil'. In this wise, both vices are twin sisters or double-edged weapon of the end time mass destruction in the society. In modern Nigerian society, it is not a strange observation or unfavorable comment to say that love of self and love for money has taken over and taken captive most of the people. Daily lives are led in pursuit of untoward self-interests that spare no thoughts for the good of others, not even close relations, friends, business associates, neighbors, parishioners, church leaders, or other members of the larger society. Such 'love of self only' driven by passion is mostly to actualize the love for money for which all manners of inhumane and unprecedented acts of violence are perpetrated.

At the home front the media continue to report cases of parents that sold their children to interested buyers including to those who will dismember the children for further sale of human body parts to make money by mystical means tagged 'ritual money' in Nigerian society. The heartless parents, who are without natural affection (II Timothy 3:3) and the reckless buyers (II Timothy 3:4) go into all of these, just for pecuniary gain. Sometimes, both parents agree to do this, blaming their conscience on poverty and the need to have money to take care of the remaining children.

Today, the church is synonymous with money making venture, because everything is monetized including 'special prayers'; 'prophetic declaration'; '*papa's blessings*'; 'special

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<sup>18</sup> Rick Renner, *Lovers of Pleasure More Than Lovers of God*, Accessed June 7, 2024, <https://renner.org/article/lovers-of-pleasure-more-than-lovers-of-god/>

anointing' and 'seed sowing'. The preacher passes on the false doctrine of transactional gospel to twist the arms of the unwary but trusting church members that their monetary offering determines the outcome of their prayers. This is another dimension to the unhealthy attachment money and consuming greed manifesting in the church in merchandise of the means of grace. Apostle Paul in another breath condemns such practices and deplors those corrupt church ministers as those who think godliness is a means to financial gain (I Timothy 6:6).

Every motivation, exhortation, religious ritual is built around money. Sometimes the parishioners are heavily taxed with specified amount of money expected from them within a specified period.<sup>19</sup> What further makes this practice devoid of clean hands and holy heart is when such monies are diverted from the godly kingdom project presented to the people as church mandate, to actualize selfish agenda or cater to fulfill some personal desire of the clergy spurred by covetousness. Oyewale Titilayo a Seminarian in her reaction to the implication of 'love of money' manifesting as undue and unhealthy emphasis on money in today's churches reports that:

The effects of the financial stress and burden that most church members experience is often a deterrent factor from regular church attendance to have some respite or avoid embarrassment if and when confronted with their expected financial obligation.<sup>20</sup>

At the worst end of these 'love of money' and 'love of self only' are instances when the ministers have actually robbed members of their money which is entrusted to them for some business purposes, procurement of travelling papers, or importation of vehicles as regularly reported in the newspapers, social media platform and by personal experience.<sup>21</sup> When it gets to this publicity level, the secular society holds the church in derision, mocks her leadership. Church members bury their heads in shame and some thereby have the justified reason for their lack of interest in religion.

The Decalogue was given to the Old Testament believers as God's law that provides godly principle for divinely approved God-Man relationship and Man-Man dealings in the society. Its principles are relevant and valuable in modern society. This is the moral theology it lays down: 'You shall not covet ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Exodus 20:13-17; Leviticus 19:18). In the same vein, self-centeredness and covetousness are both legislated against.

This is a theocratic legislation which moral principles still holds as Christ himself said he came to fulfill the law and not to destroy it (Mathew 5:17). This law was fulfilled in Christ in his teachings to his disciples and by extension to the New Testament Christians (Galatians 5:14), when he warned that: ' You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Luke 10:27; Roman

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<sup>19</sup> Adebisi Kehinde, *A Seminary Student in Personal Discussion with the Author* (Ibadan: Nigeria, June 11, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Oyewale Titilayo, *A Seminary Student in Personal Discussion with author* (Ogbomoso: Nigeria, August 25, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Focus Group Discussions on 'Experiential evidence for Perilous Times in Nigeria' at Christian Theological Seminary, Ibadan, Nigeria, June 7, 2019.

13:9-10) and... 'beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses' (Luke 12:15), which are mundane. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostles to communicate God's moral standard to the church and in this context, the church was instructed that: 'For the love of money is the root of all evil: which some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (I Timothy 6:10).

The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 was devoted to instructing the body of Christ on the attributes of true love as opposed to 'love for self only' which is a corruption of true love that Paul describes as: 'Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking'... (I Corinthians 13:4, 5). The moral theology of these scriptures cited above establish that the first two vices of 'lovers of self,' and 'lovers of money' that will characterize men and constitute the perilous time of the last days in modern Nigeria and globally, are antithetical to the tenor, teachings and themes of the Christian faith. This, notwithstanding, is the growing influence of these evils and the increasing number of people in the church, especially those who are already manifesting these end time features.

Biblical scholars and Sociologists both in the past and in contemporary times have taken up serious warnings on the evil of avarice and its consequences for the Christian and the generality of human society. D'Souza rightly observes that avarice is arguably the fundamental reason for many of the problem we face today, and such arguable outcomes of human greed are theft, murder and other crimes, wars, extreme poverty, social instability, kidnapping, and underdevelopment.<sup>22</sup>

Olaiya exposes the biblical concept of greed as he pontificates thus:  
There are many scriptures in the Bible where we encounter words that essentially relate avarice or greed, respectively to materialism, covetousness and cupidity, love of money or possessions, and attachment to money.

Since these terms have similar meanings to a certain extent, we use them interchangeably. Generally, they indicate the tendency to want more than one needs, emphasizing over-indulgence and the desire to gather mere material goods (Maximus the Confessor).<sup>23</sup>

To Olaiya, greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5), unfaithfulness to God and worship of another god, and mammon (Mathew 6:19-24; Luke 16:13); alluding to Chrysostom, Mammon is a Syrian word which means wealth or treasury money earned dishonestly referring to the rival god whom greedy people love, trust, obey and serve. He reiterates Thomas Aquinas opinion that 'avarice denies a person mental quietude since one defers to gold than that which prosper to God', and further re-echoes Longham assessments of avarice as having corrupting effects on a person's character and spiritual life leading to vices that harm society and economy.<sup>24</sup> Greed, according to Nikelly, is an immoral impediment to

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<sup>22</sup> Jeevan D'souza, "Greed: Crises, Causes, and Solutions," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no.7(2015): 1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Olaiya, "Guide Against Avarice: Examination of Mathew 6:11," *RELIGION*:108.

<sup>24</sup> Olaiya, "Guide Against Avarice: Examination of Mathew 6:11," 116



personal and societal flourishing.<sup>25</sup>For Christians, greed can be cured from one's own mind or heart by faith in God and by developing virtues such as generosity, sincere love and modesty, namely, spirituality instead of materialistic values.<sup>26</sup> Many religions and psychologists have criticized the attachment of happiness to material goods and have advocated for focusing on the spiritual and moral life.<sup>27</sup>

**Men shall be unholy or godless...lovers of pleasure more than God...have a form of godliness but deny its power. II Timothy 3:5**

Loss of faith in and taste for the sacred, spiritual or religion is gradually seeking to invade Nigerian religious pluralistic society. This grouping of what men shall become in the last days is characterized by trait that directly bothers on spiritual relationship with God, or things of the spirit. Godlessness manifests as men becoming unholy, and misplacement of priority is seen where proximate materialistic concern is placed above and prioritized beyond ultimate spiritual or eternal concern. In a Focus Group Discussion where *evidence for lovers of pleasure more than God* was the focus, some instances of these were raised.

The more subtle and insidious of these manifestations of loving pleasure and self-satisfaction more than love and concern for God cited from the general society include these narratives:

The international or Africa football matches between Nigeria and other countries that fell on a Sunday morning usually negatively impart worship service. Many Christians would prefer to stay back home to watch the football match and miss the Sunday worship service in their churches. Where such Christians that stay back home are Christian workers or church leaders, they chose to let the body of Christ suffer from their deliberate absence that Sunday worship service.

In the same context, Conrad Mdewe, a Baptist Minister in Zambia sadly reported that:

One Sunday in the early years of Kabwata Baptist Church...The building was open, but the place had not been arranged...We started the service very late. By the time I got into the pulpit to preach, I failed to preach and started crying. I wept because my own church members had voted with their feet. Football was more important than the worship of the living God. How could I continue with the sermon that I had prepared to preach? I could not. I could only weep. <sup>28</sup>

The above observation may be trivial; nevertheless, it was a great test of preference and commitment to fellowship or worship service day for many Christians who are 'lovers of football' on such decisive day. This is probably to "justify" Jesus' allusion of 'give unto Caesar

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<sup>25</sup> Nickelly, "The pathogenesis of greed: Causes and consequences," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 3, no.1 (March 2006): 65. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.50>.

<sup>26</sup> Olaiya, "Guide Against Avarice: Examination of Mathew 6:11", 116

<sup>27</sup> Manfred, 'The Greed Syndrome,' *SSRN Electronic Journal International*, (January 2016): 8-9, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2766233>.

<sup>28</sup> Focus Group Discussion on 'Evidence for lovers of pleasure more than God' at Sacred Christian College of Theology and Seminary, Ashi, Bodija: Ibadan, July 28, 2020.

what is Caesar's and give unto God what belongs to God'. It almost became a matter of Joshua in the Old Testament scriptures confronting the indecisive nation of Israel when he told them: 'choose this day who you will serve, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord'. Many church parishioners, at least, for the day, the love for football, football stars or celebrities, or the Nigerian National football team, was chosen and demonstrated as a possible or potential rival for fellowship with the body of Christ, Worship and other spiritual activities that occurred that very Sunday. The test to decide what takes the highest priority and commitment in a Christian life, love of pleasure or love of God, comes when one faces a choice between convenience or the cross, a choice between comfort and crucifixion, a choice between popularity and persecution, and a choice between familial relationship and faithfulness to ones' consecration to God. Where our loyalty lies can easily be revealed in such petty issues. The Lord has set the standard: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters –yes, even his own life, such a person cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26). 'Whoever does not take up his/her cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Mathew 10:38). Rick Renner insights on pleasure seeking in the last days is relevant here:

...people will be *excessive* lovers of pleasure –*much, much, more* than they are lovers of God. In fact, their desire for their own pleasure will be so great that it will far surpass their devotion, respect, and service to God. In the last days, people's thinking will not be ruled by what is morally right or morally wrong or what is pleasing or displeasing to God, but by the question: How will this decision or action affect my own personal comfort, pleasure, or happiness?<sup>29</sup>

We are entertained in churches today by comedians and their filthy 'Christian' joke. We are excited as women 'preachers' and worship leaders in skimpy dresses turns the pulpits to their show business and are gyrating to their rock 'n' roll metal music to the cheering of the audience<sup>30</sup>.

### **An Ethical Assessment of the Evidence for Apostle Paul's Prediction of Last Days' Vices-the Evil Triad, in Nigerian Society**

The sign or evidence of these last days' perilous times abound in different dimensions of untoward human behavior, corruption of character and perverted disposition that will dominate and direct human relationship in every sphere of existence; physical, spiritual, and relational etc. These evil triad of love of self, money and pleasure are evaluated in the context of African cum Christian social-ethics.

*... for men shall become lovers of self, lovers of money...*

African ethics as social and humanitarian ethics is driven by altruism, fraternity, notion of the common good. This is what directs and dictates the values and morality of traditional Nigerian society, as opposed to what now obtains in its modern settings. The point being that the value for fraternity encourages less egoism and self-pursuits such that people work

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<sup>29</sup> Mbewe, "A Letter from Kabwata: To go to Church or watch football," Accessed 2, June 2024, <http://www.conradmbewe.com/2017/03/to-go-to-church-or-wa>.

<sup>30</sup> Renner, "Lovers of Pleasure More Than Lovers of God."

against being 'lovers of self' which negatively impacts on their acquaintances, neighbors, friends or family members. This cherished moral value for fellow-feeling in traditional setting is grossly found wanting in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Here, it is instructive and compelling to point out that the subversion of a pivotal African socio-ethical value, *altruism* is the reason the majority of Nigerian in modern times has become 'lovers of self'. The 'love for self' is manifesting in the negative context of undermining societal or communal peace, progress and prosperity, in order to achieve selfish satisfaction. This 'love of self' is the first corruption of mankind that Apostle Paul prophesied and listed as an end time feature of perilous times. In modern Nigerian society, people are motivated by self-love, so much that human life is taken wantonly to accomplish or actualize selfish ambition. In the bid to protect self, others' interests are not considered but jettisoned and selfish ambition is pursued vigorously and projected, regardless of the obvious potential dangers, and damages it portends for society.

The violation of African ethical values for honesty, perseverance, and simplicity of life can explain the manifestation of covetousness and love of money that has gone viral in the Nigerian society today. This biblical prophetic warning for the last days, which is playing out in the Nigerian society can be attributed to a corruption and erosion of traditional African social ethics that undergirds altruism, the notion of common goods and simplicity of life. In the Nigerian political setting, some leaders of the country have amassed national wealth that economic experts have calculated to be worth a year budget of another small country in Africa, or what their state could not generate as Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).<sup>31</sup>Dezeani Allison-Maduweke, a former minister for petroleum under the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan, looted the nation's treasury mercilessly because of her insatiable appetite for luxury, unhindered access to gratify her tastes, self-actualization and aggrandizement.<sup>32</sup> At the religious level, some ecclesiastical leaders are consumed and driven by self-love and love for money at the expense of their subjects. They feed fat on their poor, weak and impoverished congregation, pushing for their own personal needs and not ready to sacrifice luxury or even necessities, as sometimes may be required by leadership. The loss of grip on the 'notion of common good', altruism, honesty, perseverance and simplicity of life as basic African ethical value is the bane of modern Nigerian society that is given to self-centeredness and craves for money. This is fulfilling the biblical prediction of a society characterized by members who are 'lovers of selves' and 'lovers of money.'

### **...Men shall become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God**

To put pleasure at the center of Christian morality or conditions for conforming to the law of God is what Apostle Paul warns the church of, in this prediction. Bentham and his disciples, such as John Stuart Mills, argued that there is one ultimate moral principle, namely 'the principle of utility.'

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<sup>31</sup> Focus Group Discussion on 'Evidence for lovers of pleasure more than God.'

<sup>32</sup> K. Nwezeh and H. Shittu, "Nigeria: U.S.\$400 Billion looted from Treasury-Govt," All Africa, September 13, 2019, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201909130041.html>.

In short, according to this school of social ethics, the primary rule of morality is to act, to bring about a situation in which the instinct for pleasure is satisfied as they can be. They consider morality as nothing more than an attempt to bring about as much pleasure as possible in this world. These scholars termed their position as 'Utilitarian Ethics.'<sup>33</sup> This is exactly the warning from Apostle Paul that utilitarian ethicists are promoting in making pleasure the cornerstone in their ethical theory. People's desire can be absurd and undesirable. An unsanctified desire which is not guided by divine enablement in conformity to God's law may be detrimental in the long run, even if it appears to produce pleasure or seeming happiness for all in the present time. The utilitarian morality espouses that the greatest happiness for the largest number of people is the greatest or most desired reward or pleasure in this world. The existential realities of life show that in certain instances, pleasure and happiness are irreconcilable. Not all pleasure brings happiness. St Augustine observed that one cannot obtain true happiness by following human inclination, true happiness can only be found in accepting Jesus Christ as one personal Saviour.<sup>34</sup> According to the Psalmist: 'you will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore' (Psalm 16:11). This proves that God is not opposed to his people getting pleasure or happiness; they are available at his right hand to give them.

We submit that Pleasure, therefore, must be sought or pursued as reward from God for doing what is right in the way he expects, according to his moral law. The Utilitarian assumption that pleasure and happiness are synonymous is against Christian morality. However, we submit that it is only by subjecting such desire for pleasure or happiness to God's morality that one can guarantee true, healthy, and positive pleasure, both in the short term and in the long run.

### **The Pastoral Context for Securing the Church against the End-Time Corruption of Self-indulgent love of money and Pleasure**

We shall now engage the Pastoral attitudes and approach to handling the evil triad of "Love of Self, Money and Pleasure." We shall give a cursory look into the New Testament understanding of love as against its perversion in self-indulgency. The reality of human needs, the position of the Bible on money or riches and how it can become the pitfall of greed is briefly outlined. Also, an allusion is made to the corruption that comes from self-indulgent love of money and pleasure-seeking lifestyle. A few empirical evidence in the local church are reported. Some Scriptural insights to avoid the pitfall of greed and lust for mundane things are highlighted at appropriate places in this discussion.

The second part of Jesus' summary of the law and the prophets is to 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Mathew 22:34-40). This love-command of Jesus proves that loving oneself is not always a negative thing to do, because that was the minimum standard against which one is to love his neighbor. This presupposes that there are two sides to self-loving. The positive side is sacrificial, seeking the good of others as it will do for self, which is the love for neighbor the Bible admonishes. The other side that is negative seeks to advance self and selfish

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<sup>33</sup> Chironda, "Nigeria: How much Did Former Oil Minister 'Steal'?" All Africa, September 29, 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201709290489.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Isaac Olarewaju, *Ethics: Theological and Non-Theological* (Ibadan: Harmonious Publications, 2004), 43.

interests without due or necessary consideration for the welfare of others or even at the expense of it. The fellow who is not happy with himself and does not love himself enough to endure hardship to have a meaningful life, will also not love himself enough to be committed to the good of others who are his neighbor and who may need him. Therefore, God expects us to love ourselves so that we can transfer same love to others. The love for God in the heart will mold the heart to reflect same love through self to others. This is why loving God with all our hearts, soul, strength and spirit comes first as the most important requirement for loving neighbors as the law of love demands. Derek however clarifies this concept of 'self-love' in his submission that:

Although the self-love implication derived from the biblical command to "love your neighbor as yourself" is still currently debatable from a biblical context, there is no debate among Christians regarding the Great Command to love God first. Pope (1991) discussed Thomas Aquinas' concept of "proper self-love" as a process of genuine love based on loving God first as opposed to "improper self-love" which is associated with "living God as a secondary good" (p.387). The simple implication derived from Pope's thinking is that there is a "right" and "wrong" way of loving oneself. A less value-laden way of thinking about his concept is to distinguish between an adaptive form of self-love compared to a less adaptive, or even maladaptive one.<sup>35</sup>

The virtue of love is the New Testament ethical values for directing a Christian social relationship with others within the community of faith or outside it. Churches should guard against the end time evil of love of self, money and pleasures. Self-care, comfort of food and shelter are not negotiable for a natural, meaningful, normal and memorable lifetime on earth. The Scriptures itself laid the foundation for the Economist, Maslow's theory when it underscores food and raiment as the basic human need that must be met for existential satisfaction about life: *but having food and covering we shall be therewith content* (I Timothy 6:8).

The Lord gives the church his fortification against this evil triad of "love of self, money and pleasure" by prescribing to us the cross, a symbol of self-denial, death to self-will, embrace of suffering, shame and stigma when it means being in the will of God. The Lord assures us of his provision for the necessities of life. He said the unbelievers who have no divine insurance seek these things but our father in heaven knows that we have needs of them (Mathew 6:3). "Be content with such things as you have" (Hebrews 13:5) is the scripture prescription for the malady of indulgence and covetousness. Hence, being content is the answer to the question of human greed and self-indulgent love and materialism. Beyond the basic needs of life the Lord may choose to entrust us with abundance in other material blessings of life. However on the other side the Scripture cautions that, *For the life is more than food and the body more than raiment* (Luke 12:23), it provides the balance view we should all have, that, *Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions* (Luke 12:15) and sets for us the priority that *you cannot serve God and be enslaved to Money* (Mathew 6:24). These scriptures are axiomatic and conclusive.

True and lasting freedom from love of money, self-indulgent and mundane things come from seeing the limitations and setback they bring to one's life. They becloud your clear, scriptural understanding of what true and fulfilled living is from God's perspectives.

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<sup>35</sup> Isaac Olarewaju, *Ethics: Theological and Non-Theological*.

Amassing wealth, pursuing materialism, and seeking to gratify self, robs you of trust and security in God as having unfailing control over your life and future. A soul blinded by love of money and self-serving materialistic lifestyle is robbed of the joy and freedom of being an effective instrument in God's hand to meet others' need and share in his work of saving humanity. This fellow only builds treasure for himself on earth being not rich toward God. He misses a lifetime partnership opportunity with God to invest in his kingdom for an eternal dividend. Jesus warns of the certain risk of 'moth', 'rust' and 'theft' that would eventually corrupt treasures on earth when a man lays up such treasures for himself, self-indulgent purposes or self-security (Mathew 6:19-20). The evil of money has its grip over the soul of a man when money is obsessively desired, avidly pursued and mindlessly served. Loving money for its sake, the pleasure it can bring, the affluence it can afford and the fabulous lifestyle it engenders is the observable dimension to this love of money at this end-time. In this context, the love of money rules and controls the desires, tastes and pursuits of its victims. The fellow whose heart has been captured by the love of money finds it difficult to part with it if it will not serve self or affords self some gratification, recognition, or actualization. The love of money is a leading trait of the evils of the end-time that will plague the church and the world (II Timothy 3:1-5).

There is a common misquote in the church of Apostle Paul's warning *that money is the roots of all evil* whereas it is "the love of money" that was identified as the harbinger of all evil (I Timothy 6:10). Money is amoral, neutral, neither good nor bad but assumes the nature or identity of the owner. In the hands of a godly, kingdom minded, selfless servant of the Lord, money can be an instrument of righteousness to alleviate poverty, feed the hungry, support missionaries or pay hospital bill for a helpless fellow. In Luke 16:19, the Lord says: "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends by means of the money of unrighteousness, that when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitation." This verse can be understood as:

Take your money which is basically unrighteous...or non-righteous  
and  
use it to make for yourselves friendship that when your money fails,  
they will receive you into everlasting habitation. Invest your money in  
the souls of men and women who will someday greet you in heaven  
with  
Thanksgiving when you arrive. What an incredible thought, to take  
your  
money and purchase eternal friendships by investing in the kingdom.<sup>36</sup>

Money, even though it may be judged as having no inherent righteous property, can be invested in righteous course that has eternal value and as well be laid up not for self on earth but in heaven's treasury for maximum security from earthly corruption. Laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven is seeking the kingdom of God first and not putting self-first. When God himself and his kingdom becomes our priority, pursuits, pleasure, and purpose in all life endeavors, nothing holds its grip over our hearts not to deploy our material treasures,

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<sup>36</sup> Derek de la Pena, "Loving Thyself and Well-being: What Does God Have to Do with it," *The Journal of Faith, Education, and Community*, 3, Issue 1, Article 4(December 2019):3, <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/jfec/vol3/iss1/4>.

practice self-denial of even legitimate pleasure, or invest our money in other to reaching the lost souls and supporting other worthy course.

It is erroneous for the Pastor of a local church to use the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19) to support or promote penury with its de-humanization of humanity resulting from lack of basic amenities; food and raiment. We do not please the Lord or qualify for heaven just because our lives here are miserable, wretched and battered. There is nothing in Scripture that prevents us from seeking to improve our lots on earth, to the contrary, we are enjoined to work with our hands so we may also have to give to others and not be at the beggarly receiving end (Ephesians 4:28). God gives us richly all things to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17) so he is not at variance with his children having stuff to make their lives pleasant or enjoyable. The Parable of Talents approves of us investing our resources, skills or even money for profits (Matthew 25:14-30). There are enough scriptural illustrations or teachings to shun laziness, loafing, wastefulness, unproductiveness, being burdensome, and not providing for one's house etc. (Proverbs 12:24, 18:9, 22:29, 26:25; Romans 12:1, II Thessalonians 3:10, I Timothy 5:8).

The obvious fact is that many Pastors of local churches in our society put themselves in a place of temptation to manipulate their people for money. The context of 'full time' ministry should be redefined especially where the local church is not financially buoyant to support the needs of its minister. Church ministers are devising all kinds of tainted techniques and unscriptural practices to rip off their people and the public. They make money off the back of poor people in their circle of influence. Two reasons for this untoward covetous practice are, first, laziness, unproductiveness and genuine lack of money to meet their basic needs, and second, covetousness of the greedy Pastors to keep up their lavish tastes and ostentatious lifestyles. Many of these ministers are not willing to work with their hands even when their economic situation and consequent family distress is harsh. They are being misguided by a warp mindset that God has not called them to 'secular job' as a 'full time' church pastor. Some others are put under guilt that makes it impracticable to invest their money, academic knowledge or business skill in profitable ventures that do not interfere with their pastoral responsibility to their local assembly because their time is still in their control and their physical presence is not necessary for such ventures. The church must also be protected from ungodly and imbalanced 'prosperity messages' that make merchandize of the gift of God. Greed, covetousness, materialism and love of money, are the outcome of such 'transactional gospel'. If this counsel is not given deserve consideration by the local church when and where necessary, we will continue to witness more robbery, sheep fleecing, milking the poor, devouring the house of the widow and 'simony' couch as 'prophetic offering'; 'fund raising'; 'honorarium'; seed sowing'; 'sowing into the anointing' and other scripturally unfounded creativity unimaginable in the church. These and other forms of predatory leadership of ecclesiastical order are those things which Christ condemns with indignation as damnable profanation of his sacred physical and spiritual sanctuary.

There is no gainsaying that greed and covetousness have turned many Pastors to false prophets. A retired military personnel, an old woman, sobbed as she narrated to us her ordeal in the hand of a church minister who she said has turned her into his credit card, abusing his ecclesiastical influence to satisfy his greed, extorting the woman financially.<sup>37</sup> A 'General

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<sup>37</sup> John MacArthur, "Avoiding the Love of Money," Accessed 12, 2024, [www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org).

Overseer' of a large congregation that hosted us for a meeting and in a discussion repented of what he now sees as greed and manipulation. He notes that:

I thought it was part of ecclesiastical privileges to enforce it on my people to get across to me a specified amount of money. I would only have to put a call through to them, give them some 'prophetic words' and demand a certain sum as I deem fit. They have no other way around it than to send in the money immediately or as soon as they can do so<sup>38</sup>.

I am happy to say that your messages on social media have turned me away from this error and I have lost some friends, partners and church members because of stopping such manipulative lifestyle and teaching against it now. This is why I invited your team to give us more spiritual understanding about the mind of God on Christian stewardship and accountability.<sup>39</sup>

The practice of specifying upfront what honorarium a guest church Minister demand from his host, and in a case we investigated, the standard of the hotel to lodge him, including the size of the hotel swimming pool, tends toward 'Simony' as in Acts 8: 18-19 where money was offered the Apostles by Simon the Sorcerer to buy the gifts of God for merchandize. This also borders on seeking pleasure, making money and self-serving. Perhaps such was invented to forestall previous untoward experiences of poor treatment of invited church ministers by some host ministers or churches. If that is the situation, then it is better to abandon oneself into the hand of the Lord and suffer loss if need be, because he that will save his life shall lose it but he who losses his life for Christ sake shall find it (Mathew 16:25). At this point it is pertinent to point out that it is poor ministerial ethics to not give deserving honor to a guest minister who definitely must have made some sacrifices to be available. The Lord himself approves that "the hireling is worthy of his wages" and "not to muzzle the ox that tread out the corn." (Mathew 10:10; Luke 10:7-8; Leviticus 19:13; I Timothy 5:18).

However, when a church minister as a lifestyle or principle has to demand for incentives or dictate his price before he agrees to be a blessing to the church, and even declining opportunity to preach the gospel because his tastes cannot be met or catered to; it is a subtle and surreptitious manifestation of self-indulgent love of this present world that swayed Demas from the faith (II Timothy 4:10). It is not uncommon to see people leaving their seats to "lay their stuff(money)at the feet of the preacher" while ministering. The people have been erroneously indoctrinated that at some high point in the meeting when they perceived "the move of the Spirit" in giving utterance or eloquence to the minister or in manifestation of physical healings, they can "sow into the anointing in operation" for specific blessings in return. The minister himself would announce: "there is a heavy anointing in the house now, sow into it!" The altar or platform where the minister stands can be seen covered up with money "laid at his feet". The early church practice of "laying their stuff at the feet of the

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<sup>38</sup> Jesuyemi Christianah (a retired military personnel), in discussion with the author at a Minister's Leadership Summit, Ibadan, Nigeria, May 31, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Alade Ayinde (A General Overseer of a Church in Benin Republic, West Africa), in personal discussion with the Author at Cotonou, Benin Republic, May 28, 2024.



Apostles" (Acts 4:34-35) was done to provide for their communal needs, and their motivation was to ensure no one lack basic needs (Acts 2:44-45). This was driven by unity of spirit "for no one calls what he has his own" (Acts 4:32).

They were not trying to 'tap' into the 'Apostolic anointing,' and the Apostles did not take advantage of the trust in their leadership integrity to mismanage or embezzle the corporate material resources. The end time pernicious spirit of greed is spread from the preacher to the people who may want to 'double' or 'triple' their money or whatever their target is as they gamble around sending their money into different ministries, outside their local assembly, with supposedly heavier 'prosperity anointing'.

The parallel truth is that the rich man in the story of Lazarus does not displease the Lord nor condemned to hell because he has money to spend, comfortable house over his head or he is able to eat three good meals a day. The responsibility for riches, affluence or wealth is weighty and many are not spiritually prepared to bear it (Luke 12; 21; I Timothy 6:17-19). This thus makes it easier for the Camel to go through "the eye of a needle" than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mathew 19:24; Mark 10:25). The Rich fool does not realize his soul security is in being rich toward God and not in the abundance from his field. He also fails to look beyond himself in the consummation of his abundance (Luke 12: 19). This is a misplaced priority of purpose that monetary power and material prosperity often drown its victim in. Apostle James condemns the rich for oppressing the poor; "defrauding their hireling", "heaping treasures together for the last days" and "living in pleasure on the earth and been wanton"; "condemning and killing the just who does not even resist them" (James 5:1-5). It is however unfortunate that money, affluence, pleasure and wealth have caused more spiritual damage, searing the hearts, blinding the eyes and deceiving the soul to choose and live for this present world and denying godliness, than they have positioned men to see their spiritual poverty. Experiences of life continue to show us how pleasure seeking has endangered many good people because of the dominion of sinful pleasure on the fallen nature of man. In contemporary churches, many godly people have also made a shipwreck of their faith by succumbing to the gratifying hegemony of pleasure. Sin truly has pleasure, the Bible does not pretend otherwise, but its pleasure is transients (Hebrew 11: 25) and pales in values to the pleasure derive from being a blessing to others and receiving affirmation from God as a faithful servant at the close of the age.

Men in the postmodern society are particularly lovers of pleasure more than God. They will rather seek to have liberty to go their own way, do their own thing, or live their own life than be compelled otherwise by some supposed godly lifestyle from biblical injunction. Their unbridled desire for pleasure drives them to wife swapping, threesome-involving a third party in sexual intimacy, and violent sexual activities, tying up their partners. It is true that lust, gluttony and greed are the sin of excess. The monomaniacal focus on sensual gratification in our society sears the conscience of most youths, driving them to involve in shady business deals, assassination, child rape, internet scam or pursuing the ungodly lifestyle of Celebrities and Music artistes like Beyonce and Diddy who have sold their souls to Satan for fame. The Church must keep before the eyes of her young people the biblical truths that giving self to pleasure and revelry will eventually destroy desire for godliness. Their prayer life will be weakened, passion for purity will wane, zeal for devotion deflated and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit deadened. Apostle Paul warns through his young minister,

Timothy, every young Christians and ministers in the church: “but she that lives in pleasure or is self-indulgent is dead even when she lives” (1 Timothy 5:).

For those who are entrusted with wealth, Jesus' litmus test for detecting when their heart is taken over by love of money is still: ‘go and sell what you have, give it to the poor and take up your cross and follow me’ (Mathew 9:21). This is a test of how we can easily, quickly and joyfully, respond to the Lord when he places a demand on our money or material things. A check on our heart to see if we are truly confident that God owns and controls all things including material possessions of life. That understanding and confidence of God’s sovereignty breaks the heart free from the allurements of riches and temptation of stockpiling, hoarding, or amassing stuff especially because of unforeseen future storm. The Psalmist rings loud and true here when it declares ‘the earth is the Lord’s and its fullness thereof’ (Psalm 24:1-2). To those who are craving for money, coveting it and pursuing it because they desire to be rich, Apostle Paul cautions that by so loving money, they are prone to fall into temptation and a snare and into much foolish and hurtful lust which drown men in destruction and perdition. He surmises that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows (I Timothy 6: 9-10). Truly God gives us richly all things to enjoy (I Timothy 6:17b), but that equally enforces on us accountability to God in our enjoyment of the things he richly gives us. Living by the above pastoral admonition can protect us from the evil triads of ‘love of money, self and pleasure.’ Guarding our hearts with the admonition to not seek the good of ourselves but to put others before us, seeking their good and getting to the point we can lay down our lives for the brethren will secure us away from the evil of loving self (Colossians 3: 13; I John 3: 6). Contemporary Christians will not automatically be helped by these scriptures and the pastoral exhortation this study draw out from them without an intentional looking into this law of liberty, internalizing them, and allowing the Holy Spirit to impart our lives with them.

### **Reflection and Summary of Findings**

1. The evil triad of “love of self, money and pleasure” is manifesting already both within the church community and the larger secular society of men.
2. Some activities at the local church level are overtly or covertly in the zone of “men will become lovers of self, lovers of money and lovers of pleasure more than God”.
3. The evil triad of “love of self, money and pleasure” blinds us to what true living is, which is living for God and impacting humanity. It robs us of opportunity of a lifetime partnership with God in kingdom business.
4. There is a biblically approved stance for cultivating self –love, having money, making profits, being rich, or enjoying pleasure and personal comfort derivable from having access to basic existential amenities of life.
5. Therefore, the scriptures should not be twisted to promote laziness, lack of diligence, and complacency with avoidable poor lifestyle under the guise of ‘avoiding’ the pitfall of love of money or worldly pleasure.
6. When we are entrusted with wealth or the goods of this world, the responsibility that comes with it cannot be compromised.
7. Being rich toward God, seeking his kingdom first, laying up treasures in heaven and willingness to distribute are sacrosanct.

Finally, the over-emphasis on wealth, materialism and fabulous lifestyle as evidence of divine approval or strong faith should be scripturally checked and discontinued. The end time church should decry and desist from the prevalence “transactional gospel” that puts God and his means of grace out for sale. The Church to the outsiders is becoming commercial centers where people come to pay for their desired goods and services and leave or stay back for more merchandise. They are never confronted with the Gospel of repentance, new creation realities and discipleship, thereby contributing to the general apathy or Luke-warmness to God and his true worship. The church should keep an eye on itself as this prophesied evil triad-love of self, money and pleasure, and men that are given to it, are already making an in -road into its faith community to corrupt it.

## Conclusion

Apostle Paul prophecy of perilous time when men will become lovers of self, money and pleasure more than God (II Timothy 3:1-2, 4) is evidently manifesting in the church and in the larger human society. The study identifies urgent need for sound biblical doctrine in the local church that empowers believers to not fall victim of this end time self –indulgent love of money and erroneous messages calculated to “fleece the sheep”. Also, the practice of “full time ministry” at the Local church may need to be contextually reviewed and adapted to the peculiar situation of the Pastor and/or the local assembly. Church ministers who at any time have capitulated to this end time corruption and have practiced gimmickry, fleecing God’s sheep for self -actualization, money and pleasure under the guise of ministering, raising fund for church project or taking care of the man of God, should repent publicly and amend where possible. The popular American Televangelist and Prosperity preacher, Pastor Benny Hinn has taken a good lead, demonstrating brokenness, godly sorrow and public repentance for ‘transactional gospel message’ and for allowing gimmickry and false prophecy in his meetings.<sup>40</sup>The church calling out such practices and personalities, from redemptive motivation, can save many lives, preachers and the laypersons, as evidence in the case of this godly Televangelist who confessed to have been swayed the second time by pressure. The table of these “money changers” and the “seats of the sellers of dove” in today’s temple or church community must be overturned as Jesus did in his days (Mathew 12:12-13); and the mouth of these gainsayers stopped as Apostle Paul commanded (Titus 1:11).

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<sup>40</sup> “Like a Dog Returning to His Vomit, Benny Hinn Once Again 'Repents' of the Prosperity Gospel,” *The Dissenter*, May 10, 2024. <https://disntr.com/2024/05/10/like-a-dog-returning-to-his-vomit-benny-hinn-once-again-repents-of-the-prosperity-gospel/>.

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