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Article

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INVESTIGATING 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL FOR GENDER ETHICS IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper investigates the potential of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 as a psychological model for understanding and shaping gender ethics within the Nigerian society. The study addresses the existing gap in the literature concerning the intersection of biblical texts, psychological theories, and socio-cultural contexts in the discourse of gender ethics. Through an exegetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, the paper explores the theological implications of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, bought with a price, and its call to glorify God in the body. Concurrently, it examines prevailing psychological models of gender identity and ethical decision-making, alongside the cultural and religious influences on gender ethics in Nigeria. The research employs a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary approach, utilising secondary data from academic journals, biblical commentaries, and sociological studies. This paper proposes a synthesised psychological model derived from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, demonstrating its applicability in addressing specific gender ethical challenges in Nigeria. It explores how the concepts of self-worth, identity, and psychological ownership, rooted in the biblical text, can foster gender equality, respect, and healthy relationships within the Nigerian context. The study concludes with a summary of findings and recommendations for further research and practical application in religious institutions, counselling, and community development in Nigeria.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Psychological Model, Gender Ethics, Nigerian Society.

Introduction

Gender ethics, encompassing the moral principles and values that govern interactions and relationships between genders, is a critical area of discourse in contemporary global society.

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Its significance is particularly pronounced in diverse socio-cultural landscapes such as Nigeria, where traditional norms, religious beliefs, and modern influences intersect to shape perceptions and practices related to gender. The ongoing evolution of gender roles and identities necessitates a robust ethical framework that promotes equity, respect, and well-being for all individuals. This paper delves into the intricate relationship between biblical teachings and psychological insights to propose a novel approach to gender ethics within the Nigerian context. Specifically, it focuses on the profound implications of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, a passage that speaks to the sanctity and ownership of the human body, as a potential psychological model for navigating complex gender-related issues.

Concept of Ethics

Ethics in Greek is *êthikos*, literally meaning something concerned with *êthos* (Greek, character), which in turn is connected with *ethos* (social custom, habit). This is equivalent to moral (Ozumba, 2001). It means a customary way of acting, contrasted with a historical or anthropological way of acting. Ethics is the branch of philosophy known as moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality. It includes moral problems and moral judgments. Ethics, therefore, deals with judgment as to the rightness or wrongness, virtuous or vicious, desirability or undesirability, approval or disapproval of our actions. Nagel (2005:379) defines ethics as the philosophy that tries to understand a familiar type of evaluation: the moral evaluation of people's character traits, their conduct, and their institutions. It is concerned with what bothers us about good and bad, the morally right and the morally wrong thing to do, just or unjust regimes or law, how things ought and ought not to be, and how people should live.

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The passage of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 holds profound theological and ethical significance within the Christian tradition. To fully grasp its implications as a psychological model for gender ethics, it is imperative to undertake a thorough exegetical analysis, considering its historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. The city of Corinth, to which Paul addressed this epistle, was a bustling commercial hub known for its diverse population and, notably, its pervasive sexual immorality. The city was renowned for its wealth and its notorious temple of Aphrodite, which reportedly housed a thousand temple prostitutes (Stacy, 1997). This context is crucial for understanding Paul's strong admonitions regarding sexual conduct. The historical and Cultural Context of Corinth was a cosmopolitan city in ancient Greece, strategically located on an isthmus connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese. Its prosperity was largely due to its trade routes and two major ports. This economic vibrancy, however, was accompanied by a reputation for moral laxity, particularly in sexual matters. The term "*Corinthianize*" (κορινθιάζεσθαι) even became a byword for engaging in sexual promiscuity. The city was home to various cults and temples, including the temple of Aphrodite, which was associated with sacred prostitution. This environment presented significant challenges for the nascent Christian community in Corinth, as believers struggled to reconcile their new faith with the prevailing cultural norms. Paul's letter, therefore, directly addresses these moral challenges, providing guidance on how Christians should live distinctly in such a context.

Detailed Textual Analysis of Key Terms

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were

bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.” Each phrase in this passage carries significant weight:

- i. **“Your body” (τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν):** The use of the singular “body” with a plural possessive pronoun “(your,” referring to “you all”) has been a subject of scholarly debate. As Gupta (2010:1) highlights, this grammatical construction raises questions about whether Paul is referring to the individual body or the corporate body of believers. Traditionally, it has been understood as referring to the individual’s physical body. However, some scholars argue for a communal interpretation, suggesting that Paul is emphasising the church as a collective body. Gupta (2010:522) notes that while the phrase can be understood distributively (i.e., “the body of each of you”), Paul’s broader theological concerns often lean towards communal identity. Regardless of the primary emphasis, the passage unequivocally asserts the profound significance of the physical body in Christian ethics.
- ii. **“Is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματός ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν):** This metaphor is central to Paul’s argument. In the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, the temple was the dwelling place of God’s presence. By declaring the believer’s body (or the collective body of believers) as a temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul elevates the status of the human body to a sacred space. This implies that the body is not merely a physical entity but a spiritual one, consecrated by the indwelling presence of God. This concept directly challenges the Corinthian worldview, which often separated the spiritual from the physical, leading to a devaluation of the body and its actions.
- iii. **“Whom you have from God” (ὃν ἔχετε ἀπὸ Θεοῦ):** This phrase underscores the divine origin and ownership of the Holy Spirit, and by extension, the body as its temple. It emphasises that the Spirit is a gift from God, reinforcing the idea that the body, as the Spirit’s dwelling, is also ultimately God’s possession.
- iv. **“And that you are not your own” (καὶ οὐκ ἐστε ἑαυτῶν):** This declaration directly refutes the prevalent Corinthian slogan, “All things are lawful for me” (1 Corinthians 6:12), which was often used to justify immoral behaviour. Paul asserts that believers do not have absolute autonomy over their bodies because they belong to God. This concept of divine ownership forms the ethical foundation for Paul’s subsequent exhortations.
- v. **“For you were bought with a price” (ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς):** This refers to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. The “price” is the sacrifice of Jesus, through which believers have been liberated from sin and death and brought into a new relationship with God. This act of redemption signifies a transfer of ownership from sin to God, making believers, including their bodies, God’s property. This concept of being “bought with a price” establishes a profound sense of gratitude, obligation, and sacredness concerning the body.
- vi. **“Therefore glorify God in your body” (δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν):** This is the ethical imperative that flows from the preceding theological statements. Because the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and has been redeemed by Christ, it should be used in a way that honours and brings glory to God. This includes all aspects of bodily existence, including sexual behaviour, self-care, and interactions with others. It calls for a holistic approach to discipleship where the physical is not separated from the spiritual.

Diverse Theological Interpretations and Their Implications for Individual and Communal Ethics

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 has significant implications for both individual and communal ethics. As Gupta (2010:1) discusses, the debate often centres on whether the passage primarily addresses individual purity or corporate holiness. While the traditional view emphasises individual responsibility for one's body as a temple, a communal reading suggests that the collective body of believers, the church, is the temple, and individual actions impact the holiness of the entire community. Both interpretations hold validity and offer complementary insights. The individualistic reading highlights personal accountability, self-respect, and the importance of bodily integrity. The communal reading underscores the interconnectedness of believers, emphasising that individual choices have broader implications for the witness and purity of the Christian community. In the context of gender ethics, this duality is crucial: individual decisions about gender identity and expression impact personal well-being, while collective norms and practices shape the ethical landscape of the broader society.

Pauline Anthropology and its Relevance to the Body and Sexuality

Paul's understanding of the human person, or Pauline anthropology, is foundational to his ethical teachings on the body and sexuality. As Bailey (2012:2) elucidates, Paul builds his theology of sexual practice on core Christian doctrines, including the Resurrection, the Cross, the Trinity, the doctrine of the Church, and the doctrine of Creation. For Paul, the human being is a unified whole, not a dichotomy of spirit and body. The body is not merely a temporary vessel for the soul but an integral part of the person, destined for resurrection. This holistic view contrasts sharply with dualistic philosophies that denigrate the physical. Because the body is created by God, redeemed by Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it possesses inherent dignity and sacredness. Therefore, sexual immorality is not merely a physical act but a sin against one's own body and, by extension, against God who owns it. Paul's emphasis on the body as a member of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15) further reinforces the idea that sexual acts have profound spiritual implications, integrating the individual into either Christ or a prostitute. This robust anthropology provides a theological basis for a comprehensive gender ethic that values the body, promotes purity, and encourages responsible sexual behaviour within the context of divine ownership and purpose.

Gender Ethics in Nigerian Society

Gender ethics in Nigerian society is a complex and multifaceted subject, deeply intertwined with cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and socio-economic realities. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for any meaningful discussion on how a psychological model derived from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 might be applied.

Cultural and Traditional Perspectives on Gender Roles and Norms in Nigeria

Nigerian society is characterised by a rich diversity of ethnic groups, each with its unique cultural practices and traditions. However, a common thread across many of these cultures is the prevalence of patriarchal structures that assign distinct roles and expectations to men and women. Traditionally, women are often relegated to domestic roles, primarily responsible for childcare and household management, while men are seen as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. These gender roles are often reinforced through socialisation processes from childhood, shaping individuals' perceptions of their own and others' capabilities and responsibilities. Despite the growing global concerns for and efforts

to protect women's rights to land and other tangible assets with economic value, various studies reveal that women still encounter challenges concerning these rights (Adekile, 2010; Folarin & Udoh, 2014; Aluko, 2015; Anyogu & Okpalobi, 2016; Akinola, 2018; Chaves, 2018). In addition, some scholars (Le Beau et al., 2004; George, 2010; Kalabamu, 2000) assert that patriarchal systems and institutions are the underlying causes of the denial and discrimination that women experience concerning their rights to property and inheritance in general, while others opine more specifically that, religion (Obioha, 2013), customs and traditions (Benschop, 2004; George et al., 2015; Obioha, 2013) are causal factors in the violation of women's rights which cannot be over-emphasised. In the same vein, Udoh et al. (2020:4) highlight how traditional customs and religious laws significantly impact women's rights, particularly concerning property ownership, underscoring the deep-seated nature of these gendered norms. The emphasis on male lineage and inheritance in many cultures further marginalises women, limiting their access to resources and power. While some traditional practices promote complementary gender roles, many contribute to gender inequality, restricting women's autonomy and opportunities for self-actualisation.

Challenges and Issues Related to Gender Inequality and Ethical Dilemmas in Nigerian Society

Gender inequality in Nigeria manifests in various forms, leading to numerous ethical dilemmas. These challenges are often exacerbated by the interplay of cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors:

- i. **Limited Access to Education and Economic Opportunities:** Despite progress, girls and women in many parts of Nigeria still face barriers to accessing quality education and economic opportunities. This limits their agency and perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependence. Gender-Based Violence (GBV): GBV, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, remains a pervasive issue. These practices are often justified by cultural norms or misinterpretations of religious texts, posing significant ethical challenges to bodily autonomy and human dignity.
- ii. **Political Underrepresentation:** Women are significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making positions at all levels of government. This lack of representation hinders the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies.
- iii. **Health Disparities:** Women and girls often face unique health challenges, including high maternal mortality rates, limited access to reproductive health services, and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. These disparities are often linked to gender inequality and cultural norms that restrict women's control over their bodies and health decisions.
- iv. **Property and Inheritance Rights:** As highlighted by Udoh et al. (2020:4), women's rights to property and inheritance are often curtailed by customary laws and religious practices, leaving them vulnerable and economically insecure.

Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the underlying cultural and religious dynamics, as well as a commitment to promoting ethical frameworks that uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals, irrespective of gender. The subsequent sections of this paper will explore how 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 can offer a psychological model to address these complex issues within the Nigerian context.

Synthesising 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 as a Psychological Model

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, with its profound theological statements about the body, offers a rich foundation for a psychological model of gender ethics. The passage asserts three core principles: the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, divine ownership through redemption, and the imperative to glorify God in the body. These principles can be translated into powerful psychological constructs that inform self-perception, identity, and ethical behaviour.

Connecting the Concept of the Body as a Temple to Psychological Well-being and Self-Perception

The declaration that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Corinthians 6:19) carries significant psychological weight. In psychological terms, a “temple” can be understood as a sacred space, a place of reverence, purity, and divine presence. When individuals internalise this concept, it can profoundly impact their self-perception and psychological well-being. Viewing one’s body as a temple fosters a sense of inherent worth and dignity, irrespective of societal standards of beauty, ability, or gender. This can counteract negative body image issues, promote self-care, and encourage healthy boundaries. Psychologically, this concept cultivates a positive self-schema, where the body is not merely an object but a subject of divine indwelling. This internal validation can be particularly empowering for individuals whose bodies may be marginalised or devalued by societal norms, such as those with non-conforming gender identities or those who have experienced bodily harm or exploitation. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit implies a constant, internal source of guidance and strength, contributing to psychological resilience and a sense of purpose.

Interpreting “Bought with a Price” in Terms of Self-Worth, Identity, and Psychological Ownership

The phrase “you were bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20) speaks to the concept of redemption and divine ownership. Psychologically, this can be interpreted in terms of self-worth, identity formation, and psychological ownership. The “price” paid signifies an immense value placed on the individual, transcending any perceived personal failings or societal devaluations. This understanding can foster a deep sense of self-worth, as individuals recognise that their value is not contingent on external achievements or societal approval but on a divine act of redemption. This concept directly impacts identity: if one is “bought with a price” by God, then one’s primary identity is rooted in this divine relationship, rather than in societal roles, gender expectations, or personal accomplishments. This can liberate individuals from the pressure to conform to harmful gender stereotypes or societal pressures that undermine their authentic selves. Furthermore, the idea of divine ownership implies a form of psychological stewardship. While individuals do not “own” themselves in an ultimate sense, they are entrusted with the care and management of their bodies and lives. This fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability for one’s actions, not out of fear, but out of gratitude and reverence for the divine owner. This psychological ownership, grounded in divine love, encourages responsible decision-making regarding one’s body and relationships.

“Glorify God in Your Body” as a Psychological Imperative for Ethical Behaviour and Self-Care

The ethical imperative to “glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20) translates into a psychological call for ethical behaviour and holistic self-care. To “glorify God” in one’s body

means to use one's physical being, actions, and relationships in ways that honour divine principles. Psychologically, this involves aligning one's behaviour with deeply held values and a sense of purpose. This can manifest as:

- i. **Responsible Sexual Behaviour:** In the context of 1 Corinthians, this primarily refers to sexual purity and avoiding sexual immorality. Psychologically, this translates to engaging in sexual relationships that are consensual, respectful, and contribute to the well-being of all parties involved, fostering emotional and psychological health.
- ii. **Self-Care and Bodily Health:** Glorifying God in the body implies a commitment to physical and mental health. This includes practices such as proper nutrition, exercise, adequate rest, and seeking medical or psychological help when needed. It is a rejection of self-neglect or self-harm, recognising the body as a precious gift.
- iii. **Ethical Interactions:** The body is the primary means through which individuals interact with the world. Glorifying God in the body extends to how one treats others, promoting empathy, compassion, and justice in all interactions. This includes challenging gender-based discrimination, violence, and exploitation.
- iv. **Authentic Self-Expression:** When the body is seen as a temple and divinely owned, it encourages authentic self-expression that aligns with one's true identity, free from societal pressures to conform to restrictive gender norms. This can foster psychological integration and reduce internal conflict. This imperative provides a powerful internal motivation for ethical conduct, moving beyond external rules or fear of punishment to an intrinsic desire to honour a loving God through one's bodily existence. It transforms ethical behaviour from a burden into an act of worship and self-respect.

How the Proposed Psychological Model from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 can Address Specific Gender Ethical Challenges in Nigeria

The psychological model derived from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 offers a compelling framework for addressing the complex gender ethical challenges prevalent in Nigerian society. This includes:

- i. **Challenging Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** The model's emphasis on the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit and divinely owned directly contradicts any justification for violence or abuse against the body. If every individual's body is sacred and belongs to God, then any act of violence, sexual assault, or harmful traditional practice (like FGM) is not only a violation of human rights but also a desecration of a divine temple. This provides a powerful theological and psychological argument against GBV, fostering empathy and respect for bodily integrity. It can empower victims to recognise their inherent worth and seek justice, and challenge perpetrators to acknowledge the sacredness of others' bodies.
- ii. **Promoting Bodily Autonomy and Reproductive Rights:** The concept of "you are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19) can be reinterpreted not as a denial of personal agency, but as a call to responsible stewardship of a divinely entrusted body. This can inform discussions around reproductive rights, encouraging decisions that honour the sacredness of life and the well-being of both individuals and communities, while also challenging practices that deny women control over their bodies. It shifts the focus from external control to internal, divinely guided responsibility.
- iii. **Redefining Gender Roles and Expectations:** Traditional Nigerian gender roles often limit individuals' potential based on their biological sex. The psychological model, by emphasising an identity rooted in divine ownership rather than societal expectations, can encourage a re-evaluation of these roles. If one's primary purpose is to glorify God

in their body, then talents and abilities, regardless of gender, should be utilised for that purpose. This can empower women to pursue education, leadership roles, and economic opportunities, and encourage men to embrace nurturing roles and challenge harmful masculine stereotypes. It promotes a more egalitarian understanding of gender, where value is placed on character and divine purpose rather than rigid societal prescriptions.

- iv. **Addressing Discrimination and Inequality:** The principle of divine ownership and the sacredness of everybody imply inherent equality. Discrimination based on gender, whether in access to education, employment, or legal rights, directly contradicts the idea that all bodies are equally valuable as temples of the Holy Spirit. This model provides a theological and psychological basis for advocating for social justice and challenging discriminatory practices, fostering a society where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper embarked on an investigation into the potential of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 as a psychological model for gender ethics within the Nigerian society. Through a comprehensive exegetical analysis, it was established that the passage profoundly asserts the sacredness of the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, its divine ownership through redemption, and the imperative to glorify God in one's body. These theological tenets were then translated into psychological constructs, emphasising inherent worth, identity rooted in divine relationship, and an intrinsic motivation for ethical behaviour and self-care. Furthermore, a critical examination of gender ethics in Nigerian society revealed the pervasive influence of cultural traditions and religious beliefs, often leading to patriarchal structures, gender inequality, and various ethical challenges such as gender-based violence, limited access to opportunities for women, and disparities in property rights. By synthesising these diverse fields, the paper proposed a psychological model where the principles of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 serve as a framework for addressing these challenges. The model posits that recognising the body as a sacred temple and divinely owned can counteract negative body image, foster a strong sense of self-worth, and redefine gender roles away from restrictive norms. The imperative to glorify God in the body was presented as a psychological drive for responsible sexual behaviour, holistic self-care, ethical interactions, and authentic self-expression. Based on the findings and implications of this study, the following recommendations are put forth:

- i. **Curriculum Development:** Religious institutions (churches, seminaries, Bible colleges) should develop curricula that integrate the theological insights of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 with psychological principles of gender ethics. This can educate congregants and future leaders on a holistic and equitable understanding of gender.
- ii. **Pastoral Counselling and Therapy:** Counsellors and therapists working in Nigeria, particularly those with a faith-based approach, can utilise this model to help individuals develop a healthy self-perception, address body image issues, and navigate gender-related conflicts. It can provide a framework for healing from gender-based trauma and promoting psychological resilience.
- iii. **Community Engagement and Advocacy:** Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community development initiatives can leverage the principles of this model in their advocacy efforts for gender equality. By framing gender justice within a biblically and psychologically informed context, these efforts may gain greater traction and acceptance within religious communities.

- iv. **Leadership Training:** Training programs for religious and community leaders should incorporate discussions on gender ethics from this interdisciplinary perspective, equipping them to challenge harmful norms and promote equitable practices within their spheres of influence.

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