

From the Pastor's Heart

Watch Your Words

Recently, Jamaicans were shocked and utterly astonished by the outrageous and offensive rhetoric of Gino Jennings. This controversial pastor is on record as having described a woman attending church with “lips all red, nails painted red, purple, blue, green”... as being “nothing but a prostitute”!



He went on to describe such a woman in church as a “singing whore, a shouting whore, an organ playing whore, a choir director whore.” And, as if that weren’t enough, he continued his misogynistic tirade: “Hey ... preacher ... if what I just said describes your wife, you’re married to a whore”! What was equally amazing is that some of the female members of the congregation addressed by Jennings were applauding him, nodding in agreement, or even smiling! Sometimes we appear to be our worse enemies. But back to the central point of Jennings’ diatribe – that women who choose to wear lipstick and/or nail polish as a part of their grooming, are to be regarded as prostitutes. That’s a wild accusation.

There was a time in history when both lipstick and nail polish were scandalous symbols associated with prostitution. In 1650, a bill was introduced in the British Parliament to ban the wearing of lipstick, but the bill was not successful. In the 1950s, red nail polish was seen as “very loud” and “promiscuous.” Some churches even banned women from attending if they wore nail polish, no doubt because of its association with prostitution. Think of it: a vivid splash of red on a woman’s lips or on her nails, worn innocently, was felt to have the power of overcoming a man. Religious and political institutions therefore felt that men had to be protected from these women. Ludicrous, isn’t it? Such thinking reflects a patriarchal point of view.

Up to the mid-twentieth century, lipstick and nail polish were still linked with prostitution. But now, things have changed significantly. Today, these items no longer carry the stigma associated with

Shun vicious labelling of people

prostitution; they are simply commonplace items used by women the world over to accentuate their natural beauty. It is my opinion, that to call women whores just because they wear beauty enhancement products is today just as absurd as saying that anyone who drinks wine is an alcoholic. But what about Peter’s admonition to wives in 1 Peter 3:3: “You should not use

outward aids to make yourselves beautiful, such as the way you fix your hair, or the jewelry you put on, or the dresses you wear.” Some may see in this verse a prohibition against beauty enhancements, but what is really being spoken against here is the expensive, attention-getting excesses, in which those of limited means try to “keep up with the Joneses.”

The debate surrounding the issue of wearing makeup is one that will remain with us for a very long time, for convictions run deep on both sides of the divide. But is it Christ-like to indiscriminately label everyone who wears makeup as “prostitutes”? I rather like the well-known quote of St Augustine, who said, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” Let us be charitable in the words we use to describe others, even when we don’t agree with their lifestyle choices, knowing that we are all humans created in the image of God, and loved by God, with all our imperfections ... lipstick and all!

Rev.