

## THE 7 SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### THE NEED FOR MATURITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

*The greatest need in the body of Christ today is growth, balance, and maturity  
amongst the people of God.*

*– Bob Gordon*

#### **What is maturity?**

One may think it is a straightforward question and conclude that the answer is easy; but if one reflects deeply, he may just not have the right answer. It should be borne in mind that spiritual maturity is poles apart from biological maturity.

A Christian survey in 2009[\[1\]](#) revealed some startling information about Christian concepts concerning spiritual maturity. Amongst others, the research revealed the following:

1. Most Christians believe that one is spiritually matured if the individual follows the rules of do's and don'ts in the church. Even though many believers agree that salvation is by grace and not works, many still hold the view that spiritual maturity is attained by how well you follow the rules.
2. There is another group of believers who do not know what the church expects in terms of spiritual maturity. This is a case of sitting for an examination without any clue about the answer the examiner expects. This is a really pathetic case and it indicates the inability of most spiritual leaders to clearly define what constitutes maturity in the Lord. Such a

situation leaves believers groping in the dark and each person is left with the responsibility of determining what the Lord requires.

3. A lot of believers have no opinion about what constitutes spiritual maturity. Once such people raise a point on what they consider to be spiritual maturity, they find it difficult to elaborate or add another item to the list. This clearly indicates paucity of information and lack of spiritual knowledge on the main objectives of the five-fold ministry in the church. Ephes. 4:11-14 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12] For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: [13] Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: [14] That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*
4. While most pastors agree that spiritual immaturity is a problem in the church, few of those interviewed consent that it is a problem in their respective congregations. Simultaneously, it was equally observed that most ministers struggle with articulating definite parameters to measure spiritual maturity. They mostly settle for active involvement in church activities as a yardstick for measuring Christian maturity rather than the development and manifestation of Christlike character. In effect, it would seem that active participation in church activities is considered more important than Christlike virtues.
5. It would appear that most ministers are vague about the scriptural references that should be used to guide believers into spiritual maturity. There seems to be little clarity and consensus about the particular Bible verses that address the critical issue of Christian maturity.

Given the existing challenge of defining spiritual maturity with precision, how

then could an individual assess his level of maturity, as well as that of others? (No, it is not being judgmental in checking someone else's level of spiritual maturity. *1 Cor. 2: 15 - But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man; 1 Cor. 14: 29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.* One major problem in the body of Christ today, is the inability of most Christians to correctly assess their personal level of spiritual maturity as well as that of others. Often times, biological maturity and financial status are substituted for spiritual maturity, a situation that has given room for spiritual babes to occupy sensitive spiritual leadership positions. The result of course, has been nothing but chaos in the church.)

In a very simple sense, maturity can be identified with the ability to accept responsibility. This ability marks the difference between a childish individual and a matured individual. According to Dr. Edwin Cole of Christian Men Network, "maturity doesn't come with age; it comes with acceptance of responsibility."

Perhaps, the most succinct definition of spiritual maturity was proffered by Watchman Nee, who said: "If a man will not move unless God moves; if a man will not speak unless God speaks; if a man will not work unless God works – then, such an individual can be said to be spiritually matured".

This is the pattern laid down for us by the Lord:

*John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;*

*John 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

*1 Peter 4:11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth:*

## TRAITS OF THE SPIRITUALLY MATURED

The following could be said about spiritual maturity in an individual:

- **A spiritually matured individual accepts responsibility according to the will of God.** The willingness and the ability of believers to accept responsibility as sanctioned and assigned by heaven is a major problem in the church. The church is filled with many consultants, counselors, advisers, competent fault finders, but very few individuals who are willing to accept the responsibility of making the church efficient and effective as determined by God. Nowhere is the Pareto Principle evident as in the body of Christ.

Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) was an Italian economist who, in 1906, observed that twenty percent of the Italian people owned eighty percent of the country's accumulated wealth. This phenomenon has come to be called Pareto's Principle, the 80-20 Rule or the principle of the “**Vital Few and Trivial Many.**” The 80-20 Rule postulates that in any given situation, 20% of people are active, while 80% are passive. It is also applied in management as follows:

- 80% of a problem can be solved by identifying the correct 20% of the issues
- 80% of benefit comes from the first 20% of effort
- 80% of sales come from 20% of products.
- 80% of the decisions made in meetings come from 20% of the meeting time
- 80% of the outfits we wear come from 20% of the clothes in our closets and drawers.[\[2\]](#)

The central thrust of the Pareto's principle is to identify the vital 20% and

focus attention and efforts on it. This vital few will guarantee 80% of the results expected.

While this may be true in management, it should not be the rule in the church, because the church is not merely a team, but more importantly, it is a body. How many people would want only 20% of their body to be functional? For a body to function properly, the entire 100% of all organs and parts must be in good working condition.

As a team, every member of the team is expected to “pull his weight” so that goals can be achieved. It is interesting to note that in the creation account in Genesis 1, God introduced Himself to man as a team player. In renovating the earth and creating the plants and animals, God said, “Let the ...”, and “Let there be ...” However, in Genesis 1: 26, when it came to the creation of man, God said, “Let us ...”

In using the words “us” and “our” during the creation of man, God sent a signal to man that achieving results on the earth must be by team effort. Not one individual can achieve results on his own. In addition, the Triune Godhead taught us that even amongst equals, there must be a team leader. The Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are co-equals and co-eternal, yet, the Team Leader is evidently the Father. The Lord acknowledged that the Father sent Him, and whatsoever the Father instructs, that is what He does.

Interestingly, the Father and the Son display a protective role over the Holy Spirit. The Lord made it clear that every sin committed by man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not receive forgiveness. We see here each member of the Godhead Team respecting each other and protecting each other. The same standard is expected of believers.

Unfortunately, the Pareto Principle is very active in the church. Very few believers are willing to accept responsibility to make the body of Christ

effective. Ironically, “the trivial many” in the church constitute the group that is desperately seeking blessings and favor from heaven.

Any member of a family who is not responsible for any chore or activity at home is either an immature child who cannot be entrusted with any responsibility, or is an irresponsible adult. Again, we see the word, “responsibility”.

Responsibility, however, transcends the desire to accept an assignment; it also includes knowing the right assignment to accept. A matured individual is not only responsible he is responsible for doing the right things; at the right time.

This brings a consideration of the difference between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency means the productive utilization of resources, such as time, money, manpower and materials used to conform to requirement. Effectiveness on the other hand, means compliance with requirement of the customer.

In other words, efficiency has to do with the prudent management of resources, while effectiveness is determined by customer satisfaction. If you prudently manage the resources at your disposal, but your customer is not satisfied, it implies that you are efficient, but you are not effective.

For an organization to be considered effective, it must effectively meet the requirements imposed on it by its customers. That is why in business, “the customer is king.”

The “customer” of the church is not the world, neither is it the unsaved soul. The “customer” of the body of Christ is heaven. It is heaven that has imposed requirements upon the church, and expects the church to prove its efficiency by productively utilizing all the resources, (spiritual, material, financial, manpower, including divine interventions) which heaven has put at the disposal of believers. As the “customer”, it is heaven that will “pay”

each believer on “pay day” in heaven.

A common term in business is “maturity of investment.” A time is expected when an investment should begin to yield returns. When positive returns do not surface in an investment, the investment is termed a “bad business” and oftentimes, bad business leads to bankruptcy. To avoid bankruptcy, the board of the company intervenes and dismisses the unproductive management or members of staff. To bring an investment to profitable maturity requires matured managers. This is one of the reasons why companies require some years of experience as prerequisite for recruiting people into certain positions.

In every organization, every member must be responsible for specific assignments and each employee must be **efficient** so that the company can render **effective** service to the customer, in order to avoid a risky investment.

Spiritual investments that do not yield dividend on maturity are chided thus, by heaven:

Heb. 5: 12 *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”*

Personnel that do not yield effective returns is referred to in the Word of God as follows:

Heb. 6: 7-8 *“For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing: whose end is to be burned.”*

Every believer should ask, “What is my responsibility in the church? In which specific area am I functioning and contributing? Is my contribution directly impacting the expansion of the kingdom of God and the

destruction of the works of Satan, or am I involved in social activities under the guise of religion?" Any activity in the church that does not meet the criteria below is not recognized by heaven as Christian work; it is social welfare.

- Expansion of the kingdom of God
- Destruction of the works of Satan

The kingdom of God is expanded as the gospel is preached and souls are won to the Lord. However, winning souls for the Lord satisfies the need of men while being used by God to destroy the works of the devil satisfies God. The need of God is that Satan must be dealt with and all his works destroyed. Inasmuch as it is important to win souls into the kingdom of God, believers need to realize that God's priority is to destroy the works of Satan. *1 John 3:8 ... For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Destroying the works of Satan solves every problem associated with soul winning.

The Lord came to undo all that Lucifer has done. The answer of God to every form of satanic rascality is Christ, and the weapon of Christ is the church. That is why the Lord could say in *Matthew 16:18 ... and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Barrister Emeka Nwakpa described the church as "an instrument of spiritual violence to prevail against the gates of darkness. This is the foundation, the first reason for building the church."[\[3\]](#) Oswald Smith insists that **"the Body of Christ is not a pleasure cruiser on its way to Heaven, but a battleship stationed at the very gates of Hell."**

The primary purpose of the church is to destroy the works of the devil; every other activity of the church is secondary. Once that is achieved, soul winning becomes easy. Without first binding the strongman, you cannot plunder his house and set his captives free. (Matt. 12: 29) Therefore, every



Christian worker focusing on earthly wealth as the manifestation of divine favor is missing the high calling of God. A lot of people serve God in the church but it is with wrong motives. Whoever serves God with the expectation of receiving a “blessing” is not properly positioned to do the will of God. Being busy in the church does not mean that the individual concerned is serving God. That is the reason why all our works shall be tested by fire, and the fire shall prove which work is accepted in heaven.

Points to Meditate:

1. Am I an efficient member of the body of Christ?
  2. Am I an effective member of the body of Christ?
  3. Do I consider myself part of the vital few or one of the trivial many?
  4. What is my specific responsibility in the body of Christ?
- **Spiritual maturity involves the ability to discern between right and wrong.**

*Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

A brother told a story of seeing a destitute by the side of the road one early morning. He felt compassion for the man and gave him the money earmarked for his own lunch so that the destitute could have something to eat. To his utter amazement, the destitute received the money and moved to a shed nearby and bought marijuana! The brother was angrier with God than with the destitute.

“Why did You not stop me?” he queried God.

“Why did you not ask me?” God replied, immediately.

Now, consider this simple test of discernment:

Is it good to give to destitute?

Was it good to have given to that destitute?

The story of Uzzah in 2 Sam. 6: 6-7 should also give us some consideration. Should Uzzah have passively stood by and watch the Ark of the Covenant somersault from the cart? How many believers, facing that same situation would not have reacted the way Uzzah did? One may say, "I cannot stand by and watch God's work collapse." That is true, to an extent. However, what if it is God who wants it to collapse? Because, even though it looks like His work, it is not being done according to His instruction, or it is now being done to glorify man, rather than God. In such a situation, whoever "helps" to prevent it from collapsing is actually working against God.

In the case of Uzzah, it was God who wanted the cart to somersault and the Ark fall down from the cart. He was angry with the priests for not following the procedure in carrying the Ark.

Believers must always remember that what matters to God is His will; not what man considers right or wrong. What is right to man may be wrong in the sight of God, and vice versa. Therefore, discernment implies seeing a situation the way God sees it and reacting to situations according to His perfect will. This ability requires spiritual maturity.

If one was invited to pray for a sick sister, and he hears Holy Spirit quietly whisper, "Do not pray." How should a believer handle the situation? Assume the sister was being chastised by God for an un-confessed and un-repent sin, whoever prays for her healing in such a situation is indirectly accusing God that He has no right to chastise her and such a one has unwittingly become a partaker of her sins. Wait a minute, does not the Word of God say, "... *pray for one another, that ye may be healed.*" James 5: 16. But, here is a situation in which God says, "Do not pray for her."

In such a situation, it is better not to pray, but to counsel the sister on the need to sort out whatever has gone wrong in her relationship with God. The instruction “Do not pray” is enough confirmation that all is not well between the individual and God. Gal. 5: 22 warns, “... *neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.*”

Spiritual maturity therefore, involves ability to discern between right and wrong from the perspective of God, and not from the understanding of what man constitutes right or wrong. It is seeing what God is seeing; the way He sees it. The sense of judgment of man cannot be relied upon as being accurate in any situation. Only the judgment of God can be trusted at all times.

This discernment does not come overnight. It comes after a lot of dealing with God, and being dealt with by God. It involves sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and training of oneself to be obedient to God without understanding the details of the instruction. According to Richard Foster, “in the spiritual life only one thing produces genuine joy and that is obedience.”

A sister once narrated an incident that occurred in the dormitory while she was in the secondary school. She got born-again and filled with the Holy Spirit early in life. One day, she was called upon to pray for a sick girl in the dormitory. She prayed and the healing came instantly. Of course, one could imagine the euphoria she felt, that God’s power was manifested at her prayer.

Later that evening, there was another urgent call in the dormitory. Another girl was very sick and she was throwing up; and “what should we do?” Of course, it is clear what should be done, “call for the healing evangelist.” As they called her name, God told her, “Do not answer.”

The instruction that came from heaven was very confusing and devastating. One could imagine the young healing evangelist yearning to be unleashed to demonstrate the power of the Holy Ghost. After all, the

Lord said that we shall be witnesses. Now here is a very good opportunity to witness with signs following and the same Lord is saying “Do not answer.” If He did not want me to answer, then why did He give the power? Besides, why would He respond to the earlier call for prayer and refuse to respond to this one? Does He discriminate? Or, could that be the devil playing pranks? No, it was not the devil. She recognized the voice of God.

As it is characteristic with God, when He gives an instruction, He rarely provides details. If He instructs a man, “bend down”, He will not explain why. If the man likes, let him bend down, and if he likes, let him disobey. Usually, it is only after the man has bent down that he will understand why God issued the instruction. And if he was too logical to obey, still seeking to understand why, he will understand after his head has been cut off – if that was what God was trying to avoid!

Fortunately, being an obedient person, she did not respond, to the chagrin and indignation of the other girls. Meanwhile, all sorts of confusing thoughts were running through her mind. It all took a few minutes, when suddenly torches started flashing in the dark dormitory and authoritative voices started barking out orders. “All the girls in that corner stay right where you are!” It was the Matron with some teachers.

In the twinkle of an eye, all the friends of the sick girl, the sympathizers, the indignant ones who came to contribute to the exciting fresh debate over the refusal of the healing evangelist to come and pray, including the sick girl, were all rounded up. Names were written down and each one of them had a date with the doctor for pregnancy test! The sick girl had committed abortion and it was going out of control.

Had the sister gone to pray, she would have been rounded up and included in the list of girls with questionable moral character. Worse than that, though, had she gone to pray, she would have asked God to pour healing

virtue on a fornicator and a murderess that had neither confessed her sin to God, nor repented of it! That, of course, would have made her a partaker of the sin of the abortionist.

It is good to pray, but prayer must be according to His perfect will. (1 John 5: 14) This applies not only to prayers, but also to giving, visiting, preaching and so on. A spiritually matured individual discerns between what is right or wrong as defined by heaven, and not by man. He seeks to find out the will of God in every situation before he acts.

- **Spiritual maturity brings soberness.**

One noticeable element in matured individuals is calmness. A matured individual is surrounded with an aura of dignified comportment, quietness, and calmness. The scripture in many instances exhorts believers to be sober. “*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober ...*” 1 Pet. 1: 13.

Soberness is a direct outflow of responsibility. The heavier the responsibility is, the greater the soberness that will be reflected. If anyone is in doubt, ask a man who has just lost his job and is faced with the prospect of taking care of a family without a guaranteed source of income.

A lack of soberness in an individual usually signals a lack of challenging responsibility or a reckless indifference to the consequence of neglecting one's responsibility. Wherever one sees Christians who do not manifest soberness in the faith, one is most probably observing believers who do not appreciate the heavy responsibility placed upon the shoulder of every believer by heaven. The Lord says, *Luke 9:23 “ And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*

God placed the cross on the shoulder of every believer. That is a very heavy burden. What does the cross signify? The cross symbolizes suffering,

shame, and death. The statement “take up his cross” implies directly that every Christian has a cross, and carrying it “daily” also implies that every believer must be prepared to daily encounter suffering, shame, and death as a follower of Christ. The instruction is, “follow Me”, and whoever wants to follow Him must deny himself and carry his cross daily. F.R. Maltby says, “Jesus promised his disciples three things - that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.”

Both of these conditions, (carrying the cross and denying self) are lacking in many believers in the church today, which is an indication that majority of God’s people are still children; matured sons of God are few.

By the way, when one carries the cross, where does one carry it to? A man cannot carry the cross and be going round in circles. Whoever carries the cross has only one destination – Golgotha.

Would a man have a sentence of death pronounced upon him and not be sober? Paul wrote, “*I die daily.*” *1 Cor. 15: 31*. The soberness of the cross is not reflected in the lives of many Christians. This may be the reason why most believers preoccupy themselves with worldly vanities and expect God to cater for such indulgence. Rather sadly, many ministries are booming and doing “good business” catering to such aberration in the household of God.

Many ministries today measure results using worldly parameters - the size of the cathedral, the worldly status of the worshippers, the pool of exotic vehicles, the frequency and lavishness of special programs, “missionary” trips to comfortable countries, the breathtaking beauty of the choir robes, and of course, the overflowing bank account.

Bro. K.P. Yohannan queries, "Why do we insist on building the largest and most impressive structures in our city when people on the other side of the town are hungry, jobless and worshipping in storefronts?"

Tony Campolo chips in, “I don't know how your theology works, but if Jesus has a choice between stained glass windows and feeding starving kids in Haiti, I have a feeling he'd choose the starving kids in Haiti.”

There is an evident lack of soberness in the body of Christ. If believers were sober, the way heaven expects them to be, a lot of the things being witnessed in the church today would not be existing. There seems to be no sober reflection of the responsibility placed upon the church by heaven. It is only a spiritually matured mind that can soberly reflect upon the responsibilities placed upon him.

As of 2009, there are over 2.5 billion souls worldwide yet to be reached with the gospel, there are over 88 million un-evangelized beggars worldwide, an average of 150,000 unbelievers die daily and enter eternity without Christ, yet, a church would invest millions in the construction of a cathedral and neglect the needy areas of the human race.

*“Oh my friends... we are loaded down with countless church activities while the real work of the church—that of evangelizing and winning the lost—is almost entirely neglected. The Body of Christ is not a pleasure cruiser on its way to Heaven, but a battleship stationed at the very gates of Hell.”* - Oswald J. Smith

- **Whatever is matured bears good fruit.**

It is rare that a 5 year old girl is pregnant. Why? She is not matured. Even if a 13 year old girl should be impregnated, it would be a scandal. Even though at that age, she could become pregnant, she is not matured enough to reproduce. It has to take a matured individual to reproduce before satisfaction and joy could be expressed at the reproduction.

The same consideration is given to fruit bearing trees. No one would want to eat an unripe fruit; neither would anyone expect fruit from an immature tree. Maturity is a standard prerequisite for acceptable reproduction.

The Lord made it clear in *John 15: 16* “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: ...*”

In vs. 8 He states: “*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.*”

Since it has to take a matured living organism to reproduce or bear fruit, what then shall be said of the multitudes of believers in the church that are not winning souls? Whatever is matured bears good fruit. Conversely, whatever does not bear good fruit cannot be regarded as matured. It is an irreversible law of nature, that a matured organism has a yearning to reproduce itself. Whenever a living organism reaches a certain stage in its life cycle, it embarks on a program of replicating itself. If it does not, it would wither and die. This law applies to plants, animals, and also man.

Therefore, when believers have been in the church for years and the thought of evangelism and discipleship strikes terror in their hearts or they exhibit a lukewarm attitude to reproducing people of like-faith, it simply indicates that the individual concerned is not matured.

Apart from this, a more serious consideration should be given to the two verses above. First, every believer is **chosen** and **ordained** by Jesus Christ to be fruitful. This implies, spiritual maturity is not an option, it is mandatory. Believers are chosen and ordained to bear fruit, not to lift hands to heaven seeking blessings! Second, as vs. 8 implies, it is bearing fruit that confirms an individual a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The sad reality is that the church has a crowd of worshippers who throng every Sunday to church under the name of Christians. In reality, they cannot be described as disciples of Jesus Christ; neither can they be called matured believers. To make matters of more serious concern, many have been in the church for many years.



It can now be understood why the Lord says that every branch in Him that does not bear fruit shall be “taken away” (Jn. 15: 2), they are cast into “the fire and they are burned.” vs. 6. There are some branches attached to the Lord that are in danger of being cut-off.

What do we require, now? Do we need a mirror or a piece of paper and a pen? A mirror to look at ourselves and admit some truths, or a piece of paper to write down the last time we bore fruit for the kingdom of God?

- **A spiritually matured individual controls his habit.**

*“Men do not decide their future. They decide their habits and their habits decide their future.” —Unknown.*

It is the nature of a child to act on impulse. Whatever appeals to the child, the child wants to do, irrespective of whether it is convenient or not. If such tendency is not checked, the child builds it into a habit which over time becomes a character.

A spiritually matured individual controls his habits, both in the church and outside the church. This of course requires discipline and order. It is quite disconcerting to witness Christians exhibit so much discipline in their secular endeavors only to manifest sloppiness in the church. Those who would study night and day to earn degrees or professional certificates have not considered it worthwhile to study the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Those who would never go late to work on weekdays are perpetual latecomers at worship services.

Much control and discipline is manifested in secular jobs than in the church. Yet, the secular job is temporal, while the church is eternal. The impression one gets, is that many of God’s people do not attach much premium to God and to His ways. Many do not consider the consequence of giving the world prime treatment while God receives the remnant of

their time and attention. A matured individual considers consequence before taking action.

An unknown person once wrote, *“I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the Church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God.”* Maturity produces discipline and orderliness.

- **A spiritually matured individual is obedient;** he remembers instruction and follows it to the letter.

*“Why do ye call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”* Luke 6: 46

At salvation, every believer confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. First, He is acknowledged as Lord, and then as Savior. This implies, “whatever He commands, I will do”. Looking at the Bible passage above, it is possible for one to be a Christian and yet be unwilling to accept the responsibility which heaven has placed upon him, even though at salvation he promised to obey the Lord.

Going by this illustration, could we imagine how many Christians in the church are in urgent need of spiritual maturity?

The Lord says “deny yourself”. There is a section in the church that holds on to “enjoying this life”. If you were to tell a man, “deny yourself” and another individual comes and tells him, “go on, enjoy yourself”, would both of you be telling the man the same thing?

The Bible passage in John 10:10 *The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,* has often been interpreted to mean a life of ease, abundance, prosperity and a life of bliss on earth. Is it the right

interpretation? Richard Wurmbrand responded to such teachings with this statement to a group of believers in Romania during a visit to his nation from exile in the United States:

*“I come from the West where some preach easy salvation. Just believe that is all. If you believe, you will not only have heaven in eternity but also health and prosperity here. You might escape totally from Communist persecution, but this false western teaching is around the corner to destroy your spiritual life much more than Communism could have done.*

*To be a Christian means to believe in Him, this is to believe in His sacrifice on Golgotha and His teaching that we too must deny ourselves and follow Him. We are meant to be crucified and buried together with Him, not in a physical sense (though in southern Sudan Christians have been crucified even in 1990) but in fighting to the uttermost against sin, the world and the devil, and never giving up even if you lose many battles.”*

*If any man will follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9: 23*

**THE DECISION TO GROW ALWAYS INVOLVES A CHOICE  
BETWEEN RISK AND COMFORT. THIS MEANS THAT TO BE A  
FOLLOWER OF JESUS YOU MUST RENOUNCE COMFORT AS  
THE ULTIMATE VALUE OF YOUR LIFE.**

**- JOHN ORTBERG**

## LED BY THE SPIRIT

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” Rom. 8: 14*

The first indication that an individual has attained, or is progressing towards spiritual maturity is determined by his or her personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ told His followers, “follow me” and as they followed Him, He handed them over to the Holy Spirit. Whoever is following Holy Spirit is following Jesus and whoever is not following Holy Spirit is not following Jesus Christ.

There is a key however to following the Spirit of God. The key lies in the ability to hear and understand His voice. The language of the Holy Spirit is seldom comprehended by many believers and this has led to many disastrous situations in which a believer would claim “God told me”, while God did not make any such statement to the individual concerned. By the time such believer discovers that God did not speak to him, an action contrary to the will of heaven would have been embarked upon. Oftentimes it results in such a serious calamity that rips entire congregations apart.

It is amazing that of all the animals in creation, the Lord chose to equate His people with sheep. If one has observed a flock of sheep closely, it would be seen that they are not particularly smart or agile creatures. In fact, one might be tempted to describe the sheep as “dumb”, in the sense of being stupid. However, there must be something outstanding about the sheep that must have caught the fancy of the Lord and He wishes His people would emulate it. The sheep has an incomparable sense of recognizing the voice of its shepherd and instantly

obeying. When the shepherd calls once, the sheep obeys. John 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*

Very few believers have been able to distinguish among the voice of the flesh, the voice of the world, the counterfeited voice of the devil and his host of evil spirits, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. It takes a number of dealings by God before a believer can confidently affirm that he has recognized the voice of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, most modern day believers have been inundated with the imbalanced message of peace, joy, and prosperity in Christ that they avoid every attempt of the Holy Spirit to take them through the fiery furnace, where men learn to recognize the voice of God.

The Lord affirms in John 10: 27, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*” The criterion of heaven in distinguishing between a sheep of the Lord and a goat that does not belong to Him is the ability to hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him. Alas, how many Christians are actually following Jesus Christ? Unknown to many, they are following the world, and many are following man-made doctrines and traditions.

How then could one describe someone who is spiritually matured? As Watchman Nee pointed out, if a man will not move until he sees God move; if a man will not speak until he hears God speak, then such a one is spiritual. The Lord says, “... *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these doeth the Son likewise.*” John 5: 19. And, “*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*” John 4: 34. The Lord did not see His ministry as His own, but the work of God. His food was to “*finish God’s work.*”

The Lord did not just respond to the needs around Him, He only did what he saw the Heavenly Father approve. He did not allow situations, circumstances, and people’s emotions to dictate or determine the flow of His ministry. That is why His ministry has eternal impact because, it is only “*whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever.*” Ecc.3: 14

Churches all over the world engage in programs and activities that cost a lot of money and time of believers. Could one imagine, if one quarter of these activities are truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, what a wonderful difference the church would have made in the world in our generation! *“It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing: ...”* John 6: 63

Very few believers have been able to distinguish amongst the voice of the world, the flesh and evil spirits. It takes a matured believer, who remains under the constant chastisement and guidance of the Holy Ghost, to distinguish between these voices.

In the book BEWARE OF SUCCESS, this author highlighted the various roles of these forces of darkness and how they confront the Godhead. Each one is considered a force of darkness because they all have the same objective of ensuring that man does not get to heaven and each one of them work contrary to the will of God.

### **The Flesh**

The flesh opposes the Holy Ghost . Gal. 5: 17 *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”*

Any believer, who desires to follow the Holy Spirit, in order to attain to the standard of the “son of God”, must realize that his first opponent is his flesh. Alas, we pamper and protect the very enemy who desires to hinder us from attaining the greatest goal of our existence.

### **The World**

The world opposes God the Father. James 4: 4 *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”*

The world hates God and everything that is connected with Him. In our generation, that hatred is manifested in a myriad of ways, including the schools where prayer to God has been banned under the guise of separation of the church and the State.

It is therefore very curious to notice that Christians are eager to make friends with the world, while in most assemblies, the values of the world are the yardstick for measuring success amongst believers. (More about the world in a subsequent chapter.)

### **The Devil and his Evil Spirits**

The hosts of darkness oppose the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 2: 8) The titanic struggle began shortly after the Lord was born. Satan moved ruthlessly through Herod to terminate the earthly life of the Lord. That assault failed because God moved ahead of the devil by getting Joseph to take Him and Mary to Egypt. Satan tried on other occasions and finally, he thought he won on the cross not realizing that God set a trap for Him; *“having spoilt principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”* Col. 2: 15. Christ defeated all the power of hell on the cross.

The devil vigorously contests the Lordship of Jesus Christ by trying to equate Him with other “lords” and founders of false religions. He has sought in various ways to demean the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as well as persuade men that salvation is not limited to Christ alone. In fact, New Age religion advocates that many ways lead to God, thereby insinuating that Christ is not the only Way.

It is easy to see why the devil has taken it upon himself to contend with Christ. It is Christ who has delivered man from his tyranny, shut the gate of hell and opened the gate of heaven. In his mad rage to take every descendant of Adam with him to hell, Satan hates anyone who delivers them from his grip. This hatred of Christ is equally extended to the servants of Christ who obey the Lord



without compromise.

This is one reason why as one matures in Christianity, the attention he receives from satanic forces also increases. The devil does not want to see genuine reproduction of Jesus Christ sprouting all over the place. Whenever Christians mature into Christ, they end up doing only one thing – destroying the works of the devil; and that for the fiend, it is bad news!

## **FOLLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*“There is only one reality. That reality is God. The soul of man must contact God, and unless the spirit of man is truly joined to God, there is no such thing as real Christian manifestation.” - John G. Lake*

The most fulfilling experience in the life of any human being is to hear the voice of God, obey what God says and see the result that follows. It is pure ecstasy. Even if it is only in a dream that one receives an instruction and it is followed with visible result in the physical, the beneficiary of the divine visitation would broadcast the experience to as many people as would care to listen.

Since hearing God gives us so much joy, why then are we seemingly unwilling to hear Him? Hearing God fills us with joy, peace, confidence, and gives us direction. Inability to hear Him leaves us confused, disoriented, fearful and uncertain about the future. Why would man therefore shun what would give him peace and joy and settle for confusion and uncertainty?

Perhaps, another look at Genesis may provide some useful insight into our inability to follow the Holy Spirit. There were two stages of the creation of man in Genesis 1: 26-27. The first involved the creation of the flesh and the other involved the impartation of the spirit man. In v. 26, God said, “...Let us make man ...” The word “make” is the Hebrew word “*asah*” and it implies to make something out of an already existing material. The outer shell of man was formed from an already existing material. Gen. 2: 7 explains that man was formed from

the “dust” of the earth. The Hebrew word for “dust” in that verse is “*aphar*” and it means rubbish, dirt, mud.

Hence, the outer shell of man was formed from “dirt”, “mud”, “rubbish”, which of course, a perfectly sane man would not want to touch, or play with. This fact alone should humble every one who takes delight in the flesh.

To turn the lifeless shell into a living soul, v. 27 states that God “created” man in His own image. The word “created” is the Hebrew word “*bara*” and it implies to make something out of nothing.

In essence, the spirit man came from nothing visible, while the flesh came from mud and rubbish. This fact alone can help us to understand why our flesh only desires in indulging in that which is rubbish and unpleasing. The spirit man on the other hand was created clean, without stain; without blemish and it came directly from the Almighty God whose name is Holy.

Faced with this scenario, man is in trouble already. From day one, man was in trouble. He is carrying pure substance in a dirty vessel. How would he avoid being defiled? How would he maintain the purity of the pure substance which is completely immersed in mud and rubbish? From day one, the spirit man was enveloped inside rubbish. Only one thing could save man: hear and obey. Obedience.

To make matters worse, after man fell, in Gen. 3: 14, God approved an unlikely diet for the serpent: dust. The decision to give the serpent dust for food highlights the great disappointment that God felt at the failure of Adam to obey Him. Giving the serpent dust as food is not divine favor, it is the manifestation of divine wrath. It was like God telling man, “Since you have decided to team up with the devil, I will hand you over to him”. The same substance, from which the flesh of man was made, is now to be the nourishment of the devil!

It should therefore not be surprising, that every satanic impulse imaginable is welcomed by the flesh. So long as man has flesh, Satan would be in business.

It remains a mystery of God that in His creation on the earth, He has permitted light and darkness, day and night, wheat and tares, life and death, sheep and goats, flesh and the spirit to exist side by side. It cannot be considered divine error but a deliberate plan of God to test the free will of man to the fullest. Hence, God can say, “choose ye this day ...” As someone once said that there can be no perfect obedience without a perfect liberty to disobey.

In having this paradoxical arrangement, God is sending a message to us, that no matter how tempting and compromising the situation around us may be, if we purpose to obey Him, we shall come out victorious. Our victory or defeat is not determined by the situation we are in or in the tenacity of the devil, but in our obedience.

Therefore, we have the Spirit of God to lead us to God, and we have the flesh striving to lead us to the devil. The deciding factor is mans’ obedience.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to understand how the flesh operates and what it seeks to do. In order to obtain an accurate picture of the operations of the flesh, it is prudent to turn to the Word of God as the final arbiter in unmasking the flesh. For one, it has been established that the flesh opposes the leadership of the Holy Ghost.

According to Watchman Nee, there are three areas in which the flesh resists the Spirit of God the most. These are:

- The wisdom of the flesh.
- The strength of the flesh.
- The vainglory of the flesh.

Unless the flesh of man is crucified in these three areas, it would not be possible for the Spirit of God to lead us. Spirit inspired work and walk is only possible when man discards the wisdom of the flesh as well as acting in the strength of the flesh. The third critical area in which we grieve the Spirit of God and hinder our consistent walk with Him is the vainglory of the flesh. God makes a significant

move through a man, and the man begins to conduct himself as if it was by his power and might. Some who do not praise themselves begin to scorn those who have not experienced such privilege as if they are stupid.

Since it is only those who are led by the Holy Ghost who can be considered sons of God, it therefore holds true that those who are not led by the Holy Ghost are not sons of God. It is therefore in the nefarious interest of the devil to ensure that the flesh hinders many Christians from following the Holy Ghost by manifesting the works of the flesh.

What exactly are the works of the flesh? How could we identify those times in our lives when we are manifesting the works of the flesh? In the next section, we shall attempt a simplified understanding of what the Bible lists as the works of the flesh. Most of the Greek translation materials in the next section are based on the works of Rick Renner in Sparkling Gems. They are used with permission.

## THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

*“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Gal. 5: 19-21*

The Greek word for WORKS is “*ergos*”. It signifies “some kind of action, deed, or activity”. It is a word used to refer to the result of someone’s labor, or what is produced by someone’s effort. “*Ergos*” denotes the result of one’s hard work.

The word translated FLESH is the Greek word “*sarx*”. This depicts “sinful impulses and carnal cravings.” Within the context that Paul used this word, it implies that the flesh has its own mind and desires. The flesh is neither a dormant being nor a passive entity but an active agent that seeks to exert its will and presence. As the word “*ergos*” implies, the flesh works hard to manifest its sinful

impulses and carnal cravings. If the flesh is not mortified, it would seek to lead man into the worst of all sinful indulgence. As seen earlier, the flesh of man was molded from rubbish, mud, dirt, and at every given opportunity, it seeks to return home.

Another interesting word is MANIFEST. The word “manifest” is the Greek word “*phaneros*” and it means to appear, become visible, to become apparent, to become conspicuous and to be well known. What it implies is that the flesh is neither shy nor timid. On the contrary, it is brash, loud, and loves publicity. The flesh loves to be noticed and even though its works are uncomplimentary and distasteful, it loves to “show off”. That is why it is so easy to notice a believer who is living in the flesh.

If you permit the flesh the opportunity of having its way, it will jump at the chance to manifest its evil desires. It will attempt to lead you into malice, adultery, envy, uncleanness, idolatry, and so on. A life dominated by the flesh is a hard life. It is filled with bitterness, strife, hatred, envy, excess, imbalance etc. Yet, the flesh cries to be in charge, it yells to have its own way and be the boss. Unfortunately, the flesh has no future; whoever gives it control will perish with it.

The most striking statement about the works of the flesh is the definite declaration by Paul that “*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” That booms like thunderclap! Paul is stating clearly by revelation that those who consistently manifest any work of the flesh are definitely going to hell. Does not the Word of God make it clear that “flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God”?

How many times has one heard Christians say, with some measure of justification, “don’t mind so-so-and-so, it’s his flesh”? This derogatory compliment has been paid to church workers, and in some cases, even pastors. Unfortunately, we tend to trifle with such statements as uncomplimentary remarks, while ignoring the deeper and weightier implication of such observations.

Manifesting the works of the flesh is a clear indication that the individual involved is opposing the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5: 17) If a fellow is acting contrary to the Spirit of God, how would such an individual enter heaven? Once a believer is identified as manifesting the works of the flesh, the brethren around him or her owe Jesus Christ a duty to call the erring believer to order and correct him or her in love. Unfortunately, the attitude of Christians to this duty of love is usually “it is none of my business”. To make matters worse, the fellow in need of such correction also retorts, “it is none of your business”. So, God’s business becomes nobody’s business until a precious soul lands in hell fire.

On the other hand, the reason for such indifferent attitude to the works of the flesh could be because most of us could not adequately recognize the manifestation of the flesh. In cases where we do, maybe we do not comprehend the details and the enormity of such words like adultery, lasciviousness, emulation, and so on.

## ADULTERY & FORNICATION

The words “adultery” and “fornication” have the same root word in the Greek language. Both are referred to as “**porneia**”. This word refers to all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage, including adultery and homosexuality. The idea it conveys is that the “Christian” committing adultery is the same as the homosexual!

A derivative of “porneai” is the Greek word “ pornos ” which is used in the New Testament for a woman who committed adultery. It actually means a prostitute. The implication of course is that, before God, a woman who has sexual intercourse with a man that she is not legally married to is a prostitute. She may give herself for lust, in exchange for financial or material gain, or a deception that she and the brother are engaged, or for what some now term “biological necessity”. In heaven, she is regarded as a prostitute.

Interestingly, a former occultist turned Christian, Nathaniel Uzorma, revealed in one of his books that in the occultic realm, a woman who commits adultery is actually seen as a dog, no longer as a human being. He further explained that every act of sexual activity that is outside of legal marriage is subject to satanic manipulation. The only act of sexual intercourse that forces of darkness have no power to manipulate is that between a legally married husband and wife.

In his quest to dominate and destroy the human race, Satan has identified illicit sex as a powerful weapon for the forces of darkness. That is the reason why almost every commercial on TV hints, overtly or covertly, at seduction. The devil wants man to think constantly about sex, knowing fully well that as a man thinks, so is he. Almost every film, every magazine, every opera, every novel, tilts towards sex and seduction. Have you not wondered, what has a half naked woman got to do with Yoghurt advertisement? To a group of secondary school girls in Europe, “Virgin is a dirty word”.

When a man commits adultery, he becomes a victim of satanic manipulation and he is placed, according to Uzorma, in what is called “witchcraft bag”. In this state of spiritual captivity, the forces of darkness can manipulate him to do their bidding. He can be used to scatter a church, start an unnecessary war, steal money from a corporation until the corporation collapses, wreck the economy of a nation, commit injustice, or commit suicide!

The woman who surrenders her virtue to become a prostitute also enters spiritual captivity as a “blind witch”. This refers to someone used by the forces of darkness for witchcraft activities but does not regard herself as a witch. Unfortunately, some of the women in this category speak in tongues and shout Hallelujah at Christian meetings. They are perfect “spiritual moles” for the kingdom of darkness.

Adultery must be repented of and forsaken. It defiles to hell. Proverbs 6: 32 - *But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul*. The adulterer is not destroying his business or his career, so

it is possible for him to feel that he is a “sharp guy”. Rather, he is destroying his own soul, the only thing man possesses that all the wealth in the world cannot pay for. Because a man continues to make money and prosper in business after committing adultery does not imply that he has escaped judgment. God never said that adultery would hamper or hinder earthly prosperity. The invaluable prize which adultery steals is the soul. Jesus Christ makes it clear that all the wealth in the world cannot pay for the soul of man. *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? [37] Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Mark 8:36-37

Then, there is the spiritual implication of virginity. When a man sleeps with a woman for the first time, there is blood covenant between them. There are three types of covenants mentioned in the Bible:

- The covenant of salt
- The covenant of sandal
- The blood covenant

In the spirit realm, blood covenants are very powerful and difficult to break. The common practice in the world now is for a woman to have a blood covenant with one man, while she sleeps with many others thereby bringing defilement on herself and on the land. To make it worse, a woman enters into a blood covenant with one man, while she produces children through another man!

A leading intercessor for Africa disclosed that during series of counseling and prayer sessions, intercessors have come to discover that whenever a man sleeps with a woman who is not his wife, he is actually sleeping simultaneously with the last seven men who slept with the woman. Whatever disease or spiritual problem that any of those seven men had, the new “customer” is liable to acquire them. This, according to Barrister Nwakpa, is one of the reasons why AIDS is spreading like wildfire.

Every female child of God must learn that virginity is the only thing you have,



that you can give only once in your lifetime and only to one person; and, it is released with a blood covenant between the woman and the man. The virginity of a woman is meant for only one man. It is a seal, placed upon the woman by the Almighty God, which is why in the beginning He created them “male and female”. Therefore, it must not be released until the rightful owner comes.

Scripturally, when did the patriarchs in the Bible marry their wives? There was no wedding recorded for Isaac and Rebecca, neither was there another wedding ceremony for Jacob and Rachel. The moment the man slept with the woman, she became his wife. The blood covenant between them is unbroken. If it could be broken, Jacob should have rejected Leah on the basis of the deception of Laban. The moment he slept with her, deception or no deception, she became his wife.

This probably is the understanding the sons of Jacob had when they were informed that Shechem had forcibly slept with Dinah. (Gen. 34: 1-26) The young man actually married their sister without consulting them or seeking their consent. The moment a man breaks the virginity of a woman, he has himself a wife. The public wedding is just formality. A blood covenant has been established between them in the spirit realm. Satan understands this spiritual truth hence he seduces man to keep committing adultery and fornication, and makes it look modern and civilized so that confusion and chaos can continue to reign in the human society.

From a spiritual perspective, divorce is not just a case of two married people separating, but it also extends to every situation in which a woman surrenders her virginity to one man and goes to marry another. The woman has established a blood covenant with one man in the spirit realm, yet she is producing children through another man. Spiritually speaking, she has “divorced” the man she has a covenant with, while she lives with another man, with whom she has no blood covenant. Little wonder there is so much confusion in the world. We can now understand why God says, “I hate divorce”.

In the case of women who lost their virginity before they became born-again, we

just have to rely on God to sort out every spiritual complication that has entangled them in the spirit realm. We have this assurance since God promised to give every one who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior a new beginning. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* 2 Cor. 5: 17. While we can rely on this truth, we may have to wait till we get to heaven to find out what happens to those, who after getting born-again, cleansed and forgiven, returned to adultery and fornication. It is written, *“... Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”* How did heaven answer, *“God forbid.”* Romans 6:1-2

It is therefore very dangerous for a child of God to commit adultery. Like the scriptures say, *“The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”* 2 Pet. 2: 22

What saith the Lord? Flee fornication. (1 Cor. 6: 18) It is bad enough that any individual should commit adultery. It is a calamity if he or she is a Christian. For a sister, it implies that she has left her position on the throne of God, where she is seated with Jesus Christ and has descended to a low state of a prostitute or in the words of Nathaniel Uzorma, to the state of a dog.

Seeing how dangerous adultery is, every believer must exercise considerable precaution to prevent and avoid it. The starting point is to guard the heart with all diligence, because every sin originates from the mind. Bearing in mind that Satan plays mind games with people, Christians should pay attention to what they permit their minds to dwell upon. This may be the reason why the Holy Spirit placed “uncleanness” as the next work of the flesh, immediately after adultery and fornication.

## UNCLEANNES

The Greek word translated “uncleanness” is “akatharsia”. It is derived from “kathairo” which implies something that is pure, or cleansed. To indicate that

something is impure or unclean, the prefix “a” is added to “kathairo”, similar to turning “clean” into “unclean” through the prefix “un”.

“Akatharsia” refers to lewd, dirty, unclean, obscene thoughts that ultimately produce unclean and dirty actions. Evil spirits greatly desire to fill our minds with lewd and unclean thoughts in order to propel us to such undesirable actions.[\[4\]](#)

Unlike other animals that are creatures of instinct, man rarely acts without first contemplating the action. If a man slaps another man, the assaulter has been thinking about that action long before he finally carries it out. His thoughts would have formed such habit in him before it manifests in the physical. *“For as he thinketh in his soul, so is he ...”* Pro. 23: 7

The forces of darkness recognize this nature in man, and Satan in his characteristic goal of defiling every thing God has put in man, seeks constantly to manipulate this feature in man to further the objectives of hell. Forces of darkness seek to define what man should think through bombarding human minds with obscene communication. The world today is filled with dirty pictures in movies, TV, magazines, catalogues, internet and worldly music, through lyrics and videos. Everywhere one turns, there is one obscene material or the other. Even if a fellow refuses to watch worldly movies or read soft-porn magazines, he cannot close his eyes on the street. There are giant billboards at strategic corners with offensive and seductive materials.

It is commonly acknowledged that the battle ground in spiritual warfare is the mind of man. John G. Lake said, “A man’s life will be as the character of his thoughts. If he thinks evil, he will be evil. If he thinks holy, he will be holy. His outward life will be as his inner impulse is.”

Smith Wigglesworth says, “The devil knows that if he can capture your thought life, he has won a mighty victory over you. I come across people everywhere I go who are held bound by deceptive conditions and these conditions have come about simply because they have allowed the devil to make their minds the place

of his stronghold.”

An unknown writer chips in: “If the devil can control your mind, he will control your life.” If the devil can capture the mind of a man, he has won a mighty victory over that individual. 2 Cor. 10: 3-5 says,

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

To start with, what are strongholds? These are lies of the devil that man believes. The devil utilizes the strategy of constant repetition to compel people to believe his lies. Once that layer of falsehood has been put in place, men would die defending the satanic error rather than embrace the truth. This same strategy was equally utilized by the Nazis during the Second World War. Josef Goebbels, the head of the Nazi propaganda machinery boasted, “Tell a lie a thousand times, and it will become the truth.”

The spiritual weapons at the disposal of each believer are mighty to uproot every satanic impulse projected into the mind of the Christian. With our weapons of warfare, we are capable of pulling down strongholds, casting down imaginations, taking every ungodly thought captive to obey Jesus Christ.

Every believer has been made strong by God to overcome unclean thoughts, and by extension, every unclean action. There is therefore no justification for a child of God to indulge in obscene and lewd actions, since he has been equipped to destroy them from source.

Romans 12: 1-2 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*

Two key words that apply to the present subject are: conform and transform. The

Greek word translated “conform” is “suschematizo” which implies to *copy, to follow the pattern of another, to fashion self according to*. The other word “transform” is the Greek word “metamorphoo”. This means *to change, transfigure, transform*. It is from the word “metamorphoo” that we derive the word metamorphosis.

Believers are commanded not to copy the world, but to change from within through the renewing of the mind. The key to overcoming uncleanness is to change all the defiling materials programmed into our minds as unbelievers with materials that edify man and glorify God. It is a task that has to be done consciously and with determination. A clean mind will not come by proxy. Every believer has the responsibility of transforming his mind in order to avoid conforming to the world.

Unfortunately, there seems to be little regard paid to this discipline in the church. It is becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line between believers and unbelievers in the world as the same attitude manifest in both realms. Apart from heaven, most believers and unbelievers have the same values, care for the same things, fear similar terrors, and have identical lifestyles. Why is this so? It could be that many of God’s children rather than be transformed by the renewing of the mind, have conformed to the world.

In two instances in the scriptures, the Lord encountered two different people that became insane as a result of unclean thoughts.

*And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,* Mark 1: 23

*And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,* Mark 5: 2

The Greek word translated “unclean” in both instances is “akatharsia”. It would seem that both men have pondered for a long time over unclean thoughts that it opened a gate for unclean spirits to enter into them.[\[5\]](#)

We should understand therefore, when Paul writes that those who do such things

shall not inherit the kingdom of God, it simply means that heaven shall not open its gates to an individual harboring evil spirits to come in. Indulging in unclean thoughts will paralyze an individual's walk with the Holy Spirit and stultify any relationship with the Lord. It is not enough to claim being born-again or filled with the Holy Spirit. We must equally be diligent to keep our minds pure and free from any unclean thought.

Of greater importance is the need to protect children from harmful and defiling materials. The internet and satellite TV are deep pits waiting to swallow Christian youths and children. Parents, teachers, and guardians have a responsibility to monitor the films that the children watch, and also place restrictions on the web-sites that their children can access. If this is not done early in life, the devil can establish strongholds in such tender minds that may prove disastrous in the future.

Having seen how destructive unclean thoughts are, the important question now is: how can a believer counter attack the evil spirits projecting such defiling thoughts?

From experience, one sure way of successfully overcoming sinful thoughts is to release the word of God. Ephesians 6: 17 describe the word of God as the sword of the Spirit. This implies that whenever the word of God is spoken by faith, the sword of the Holy Spirit is unleashed in the spirit realm. Because it is a spiritual sword, it will cut to shreds spiritual creatures. The Lord demonstrated this when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness. Three times the temptation came, and three times the Lord responded with the sword of the Spirit. After three slices by the sword of the Holy Ghost, Satan left.

Confessing Bible passages like Rom. 6: 14, "*Sin shall not have dominion over me, because I am not under the law but under grace*" provides immediate relief from slimy spiritual aerial bombardment. Of course, evil spirits do not give up easily, so the believer must also be ready to fight back each time they re-launch the attack.

Second, one should realize that the devil and the flesh are in partnership.

Oftentimes, the devil works through the “old man” to stimulate people into sinful activities. Another method therefore is to call the “old man” by its name and nail it to the cross of Jesus. Rom. 6: 6 - *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”* A thrust like: “You dirty old man, I nail you to the cross of Jesus Christ”, will definitely silence the flesh. It should not be forgotten that we obtain deliverance from sin through the cross of Jesus Christ, while forgiveness comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. The flesh cannot be bound or cast out, it can only be crucified.

Christ accomplished two works for us on the cross. He obtained forgiveness of sin for us through His blood, and secured deliverance from sin for us through the cross. The blood of Jesus will wash away our sin, but it cannot stop us from committing another sin, only the cross can do that. (Rom. 6: 6). For most believers, they stop at the level of the blood and do not proceed to receive deliverance from sin by the cross. How do I obtain the working of the cross to destroy the power of sin in my life? Rom. 6: 11 says, *“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Deliverance from sin through the cross is obtained in a similar way salvation is received. It comes by faith. The believer is commanded to “reckon”, count himself dead to sin, and *“... sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”* Rom. 6: 14

If there is one area in which believers need to crucify the flesh and its impulses, it is in the thought life. Once the voice of the flesh can be silenced in the mind, holiness becomes a way of life and spiritual maturity is accelerated.

## LASCIVIOUSNESS

The Greek word translated “lasciviousness” is “aselgeia” and it describes a state of “excess”. It primarily refers to “excessive consumption of food, or wild,

undisciplined living that is especially marked by unbridled sex.”[\[6\]](#) Other rendering of the word “lasciviousness” are filth and debauchery.

“Aselgeia” depicts a condition of living which is the direct opposite of moderation. When an individual lets go of all restraint and crosses the border of self-control, he or she is described by the word of God as being “lascivious.” Lack of moderation can be manifested in eating, talking, dressing and wearing of jewelries, as well as in “jesting that is not convenient”. All these excesses are just as perverted as unbridled sex.

“Aselgeia” is listed as the principal sin of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. 2 Pet. 2: 6.[\[7\]](#) Other references to lasciviousness in the scriptures are found in Mark 7: 22; 2 Cor. 12: 21; Eph. 4: 19; 2 Pet. 2: 7

The Word of God teaches “moderation” for Christians. A life void of moderation is a life without control. When Christians exhibit the worldly characteristics of amassing wealth and flaunting it, little do they realize that they are lascivious. Because people have something in abundance, is no reason why it should be flaunted to the point of excess.

A natural prerequisite for moderation is soberness. Only a sober individual can exercise moderation. When people become intoxicated with wealth, position, possessions, they naturally engage in activities that tend toward excesses. Lasciviousness is natural tendency of the unregenerate mind. The story was heard of the Bishop who built a personal house of 21 bedrooms. No, he was not running a guest house! Some other Christians manifest lasciviousness in the accumulation of cars, some in clothing, while others are in love with property acquisition and have taken it upon themselves to have houses in every choice area they can found.

Again and again, the Word of God charges believers to be sober, temperate, and self controlled. The things of the world must be used as if not using it (1 Cor. 7: 31); or else, the heart will fall in love with world. Once that happens, the



individual breaks apart from God. *1 John 2:15-16 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

Without soberness, it becomes impossible to avoid the wiles of the devil. A riotous life that is given to excesses easily falls into the trap of the evil one. (1 Pet. 5: 8) One distinguishing mark of a spiritually matured believer is self-control and soberness. A lascivious believer cannot be led by the Holy Spirit.

## IDOLATRY

Oftentimes, when we think of idolatry, we conjure in our minds a mental picture of someone bowing down before a stone effigy or a carved wooden object. To some of our 21<sup>st</sup> century “civilized” minds, an idolater is someone who bows down to an image. The Christian who busily pursues money and business at the expense of devotion to God is “maximizing his potential”.

It is interesting to note that Paul was writing to Christians and listed idolatry as one of the works of the flesh that believers should be aware of. Does that imply that one can be “born-again” and yet be listed in heaven as an idolater?

The Greek word translated idolatry is “eidololatria”. It means worship of idols. The word is a combination of “eidolon” and “latria”.

“eidolon” – a man made idol; a heathen edifice; a pagan statue; or an image of a false god.

“latria” is derived from “latreuo” means to work or to serve. Primarily, it means one’s extreme devotion and service to something he worships.

According to Renner, “idolatry occurs when one gives complete and undivided attention, devotion, passion, love, or commitment to a person, project, or object other than God.”

To Dake, an idol is a false god, usually made visible in images, or invisible, in business pursuit, pleasure, honor where self is preferred above the honor and glory of God.

From the definition above, it is clear that there are two types of idols.

- Overt idols
- Covert idols

The overt idols are clearly seen in images carved by man as objects of worship. God contended with the Old Testament saints again and again over the worship of idols and eventually exiled the nation to Babylon on account of the Israelites' worship of man made images.

In the Old Testament, there are three distinct categories of idolatry:

- Fetishism, or the worship of trees, rivers, hills, stones, etc.
- Nature worship, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, as the supposed powers of nature.
- Hero worship, the worship of deceased ancestors, or of heroes. [\[8\]](#)

In the New Testament the term idolatry is used to designate covetousness.

*Col. 3: 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*

*Ephes. 5: 5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

*Matthew 6: 24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

It may be prudent to refer to a modern day dictionary to correctly define what covetousness means. According to the Merriam Webster's dictionary, it is:

**1** : marked by inordinate desire for wealth or possessions or for another's possessions.

**2 : having a craving for possession COVETOUS GREEDY ACQUISITIVE GRASPING  
AVARICIOUS** mean having or showing a strong desire for especially, material possessions. [\[9\]](#)

This attitude is what God calls idolatry. It should be clearly understood that an idolater, in the presence of God, is not just someone bowing down before an image. Anyone who has a tendency to amass material possessions is also an idolater.

Why would God equate covetousness with idolatry? Idol worshippers only seek the blessings that come from God and not God Himself. On the contrary God seeks us and not what belongs to us. So, whosoever seeks God for what he can receive from God is an idolater. Rather than teach and encourage believers to seek and serve God for Who He is, people are encouraged to serve God and be faithful to Him so they can receive His “blessings” which of course are material and financial increase. It is not right to serve God for what one can receive from Him. We owe God allegiance and loyalty for Who He is.

Therefore, while it is possible for believers to shun worship of images as well as that of celestial bodies, they can still be ensnared in the sin of idolatry through unbridled lust for earthly wealth. Alas, that is the “blessing” most ministries promote through the prosperity message. While urging believers to claim God’s blessing for material and financial wealth, little do they realize that the motivating factor in them is the desire to acquire what other people have. The lust for earthly wealth has gotten so bad in the church that believers compete with unbelievers for its accumulation.

The underlying attitude is: *“If an unbeliever can have this, children of God should have more.”*

Messages prophesying transfer of wealth from the unbelievers to the believers only serve to fuel covetousness and greed in the people of God. The Godly

injunction of contentment has been thrown overboard in many Christian assemblies. *1 Tim. 6: 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

As pointed out in BEWARE OF SUCCESS, many Christians erroneously believe that possessing earthly wealth is the sign of divine favor for the people of God under the new covenant. The Word of God foretold of this attitude and describes those who subscribe to it as follows:

*1 Tim. 6: 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

Covetousness is idolatry. It is a work of the flesh. There is need to mortify the flesh by the Holy Spirit before it leads one to be preoccupied with activities that steal the devotion that belong to Jesus Christ.

## WITCHCRAFT

There is an interesting paradox about the word “witchcraft” when it is traced to its root. Witchcraft connotes something odious, evil, malevolent and destructive. Yet, it is a word derived from the Greek “pharmakeia”. This same word is the root word for pharmaceutical and pharmacy. Now, no civilized person considers pharmacy evil or destructive, but flinch upon hearing the word “witchcraft”.

“Pharmakeia” is the Greek word for medicines or drugs that inhibit a person’s personality or change their behavior. According to Renner, these could be called mind-altering drugs. The same word was used in connection with sorcery, magic, or witchcraft.

What, then, is the connection between witchcraft and the flesh?

Historically, priests in pagan temples gave worshippers mind-altering drugs as temporary relief from the problems they faced. It was customary for the pagan priests to indulge the people in fake hope rather than provide them with permanent solutions to the problems they faced. Rather than encourage the

people to face the truth about themselves and their situations, the mind-altering drugs they administer provided a temporary “high” feeling for the worshippers.

After each “worship” session, the people return home to find the same situation still waiting. When the pressure mounted, the unfortunate people returned to the temple for another fix, and a temporary suspension of their unfortunate situation.

If the pagan priests had been conscientious enough to have told the people some blunt truth, reality would have compelled them to face the problems and tackle them. Unfortunately, the so-called worshippers became addicted to the mind-altering drugs, while no solution appeared.

It is an unfortunate analogy when it is implied that believers can also indulge in the same deception. What the pagan priests were doing in those days, that qualify it to be termed “phamakeia”, sounds much like the practice in some of the churches today that use special programs to promise people special blessing. Rather than teach repentance from sin and obedience to God as the keys to a peaceful and fruitful living, most ministries proceed to make false promises on behalf of God while leading people to trust in false expectations.

Hear this, “God said anyone who attends this program will receive all their miracles.” Of course, gullible crowd will gather to receive manna from heaven. The following year, another program is planned with another hefty promise on behalf of God, “Whoever attends this program will receive all their miracles.” Wow. Wait a minute. I thought you mentioned last year that if they attended the previous program God promised to give them all their miracles. So, if God had given them all their miracles last year, what are they coming to do this year? All means all.

It is no longer strange to hear an over excited Pastor proclaim from the pulpit, “God will raise 10 millionaires in this church this year!” One might have been tempted to believe that “prophecy” if the Pastor had yelled, “God will raise 10 missionaries in this church this year!” Unfortunately, the “god” most Christians worship today does not send believers to the mission field; “it” sends them to

banks with tons of cash! There is a yawning lacuna between what Jesus Christ commanded His church to do, and what present day pastors would have us believe is the will of God for His people.

The fault does not entirely lie on the bosom of the pastors. The “Christians” also carry a substantial part of the blame. Most people are unwilling to face the truth about themselves and their situations. The normal response of the average human being is to find someone to blame when things go wrong. If it is not a “step-mother”, it would be a “mother-in-law”, or an envious colleague. As we observed while at the University, when students fail, rather than attribute it to poor performance in the examination, the usual statement is “they failed me”. Rather than own up and agree “I failed”, the responsibility for the failure is shifted to the lecturer who “passed” some students, and arbitrarily chose to “fail” some.

Having noticed this trait in people, some pastors decided to play to the gallery. If telling the truth implies that people will stop coming to church, which translates at the end of the month to low offering and tithes, then, tell them what will make them come back next week. Some Christians are like the ancient Israelites, - *Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:* Isaiah 30:10

This next illustration may sound strange, but it is true. A pastor in a fairly big local assembly in Lagos preached a soul searching message on discipleship. The people were so quiet one could hear a pin drop. The conviction was clearly seen on the worshippers that they had fallen short of the expectation of the Lord. After the worship service, one of the elderly ministers called this pastor and sternly remonstrated with him.

“Well done, pastor. When you have driven them away, your eyes will clear.”

That was the last time a similar message was heard from that pastor.

It is a common statement amongst pastors that a church that meets the needs of

the people will always grow. Two points should be considered in this view. The first is: was the church established to meet the needs of people or to meet the needs of God? Secondly, is the growth referred to spiritual growth or numerical growth? Churches that promise miracles and special blessings are filled to overflowing, but could that be considered church growth? The Lord is more interested in spiritual growth than in physical growth. It is only those who grow spiritually that can be depended upon to do the will of God; and it is only those who do the will of God that will abide forever! (1 Jn 2: 17) It should be borne in mind that this issue was raised by the disciples of the Lord -

*Luke 13:23-24 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, [24] Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Successful ministry is not determined by the size of the crowd, but by how many of the worshippers make heaven. As noted by some Arab Muslims that converted to Christianity, “In the afterlife, nothing will help us but the truth.”[\[10\]](#)

Therefore, it is witchcraft to hide the truth from people. The word witchcraft from “pharmakeia” refers to the attempt of the flesh to avoid being confronted and changed. Rather than face the truth about itself, the flesh would prefer to be told a lie. This unfortunately, is what most pastors are promoting. If each pastor can adopt the standard of the Lord, Who once had a revival program attended by 5,000 men, not counting the women and the children, and as the ministry progressed, He proceeded to emphasize some hard truth. The reaction of the flesh was instant. “This is a hard saying”; screamed the flesh, “who can hear it?” From that moment, the crowd left him. The next statement of the Lord was directed at the 12 disciples, “Will ye also go away?” Jn 6: 60,67.

How many of today’s mega-men-of-God will risk a reduction in their crowd from 5,000 down to 12 members simply because they insist on nothing but the truth, as defined by heaven? No, they will apply “wisdom”.

Are you willing to accept responsibility for the problems in your life and identify

your personal shortcomings that created the problems? Or, are you also one of those blaming ancestral covenants for present day travails?

For the benefit of those who hold on to -Exodus 20:5 (*for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;*) as proof that ancestral sins can affect a regenerated child of God, one would suggest a consideration of later statements of God on this issue.

*Jeremiah 31:29-30 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. [30] But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

*Ezekiel 18:2-4 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? [3] As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. [4] Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*

*2 Cor. 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

A lot of ministries thrive on breaking ancestral covenants; why not simply break disobedience in the lives of the people? Every problem that a man has is based on disobedience.

Rather than encourage people to focus on demonic oppression through ancestral spirits, is it not better to encourage the people to be filled with the Holy Ghost? Why does it have to be evil spirits that always possess people? Why should it be evil spirits only that have access into the lives of the believers? Why cannot the people be possessed by the Holy Ghost? After all, both are spirit beings.

The answers to these questions could simply be that Christians are not grounded in the truth. Since Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth, He can only abide with those grounded and established in the truth. Evil spirits on the other hand, find



easy abode with those living in falsehood.

Therein lies the answer to witchcraft as a work of the flesh. Any Christian who avoids the truth is trafficking in witchcraft.

## HATRED

The Lord commanded in John 13:35 - *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* Since the Lord commanded love, as a mark of true discipleship, it is perfectly natural that the flesh shall choose hatred as part of its characteristics.

The word translated hatred as a work of the flesh is the Greek word – “echthra”. It expresses the idea of an intense hostility that one feels toward another person. The word “echthra” pictures enemies in a military conflict, where the rule is “kill or get killed.” The word denotes a personal enemy.

As strong and as dangerous as this emotion is, it is likely to be found in believers who manifest the works of the flesh. This work of the flesh describes Christians who cannot get along with each other. It is a negative sentiment displayed by individual Christians against each other, by local assemblies, and in some extreme cases, by denominations.

An example of this type of enmity was described in Luke 23: 12 -

*And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

The relationship between Pilate and Herod was one of “enmity”, “echthra”. According to Dake, “This enmity is thought to have come between them because Pilate had mingled the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices” (Luke 13:1-2) Both men felt deep animosity for each other, and humanly speaking, such bitter enemies could not be reconciled.

Over the ages, men have felt such animosity towards each other, and it has

resulted in carnage and destruction. When one considers the millions of lives lost during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> world wars, it could only have been unimaginable hatred in the hearts of “civilized” men against each other. Some of the cruelty meted out to prisoners of war or conquered forces are the results of deep-seated hatred.

Satan has always provided man an excuse for harboring grudge, resentment, hatred, ill-will, and animosity towards other people. What most people do not realize is that such negative emotions are actually the sentiments of Satan himself towards man, not of man towards another man. From the moment man fell, the human race adopted the character of Satan, and unguarded men and women have been used from the days of Cain to act out the script written by hell.

Whenever the temptation to hate someone plays up, it is good to remember that love is the character of God, while hatred is a satanic emotion. A good method to overcome hatred is to turn the offending party into a prayer point. Bringing Jesus into such situations helps turn the situation around for the better.

For example, in the account of Herod and Pilate in Luke 23: 12, even though they had deep animosity for each other, the day the two enemies met Jesus, they became friends! The interesting aspect of their interaction with the Lord is that they neither worshipped Him, nor accepted Him as Lord and Savior; they merely set eyes on Him and their enmity turned into friendship.

What makes the reconciliation engendered by the presence of the Lord between Pilate and Herod more significant is the character of the Herod in this account. Several men named Herod ruled in Israel over the years and the most famous was Herod the Great. After his death on 4 BC, his territory was divided among his three sons.[\[11\]](#) The three sons were:

- Herod Archelaus, was made governor of Samaria in 4 BC when his father, Herod the Great died. This made him the Herod ruling when Mary, Joseph and Jesus returned from Egypt. (Matt. 2: 22) Because of him, Joseph settled the Mary and Jesus in Galilee. Herod Archelaus was so

despised that the Jews and the Samaritans united to petition that he be removed from power by Rome. In 6 AD, he was exiled to Gaul, modern day France where he died.

- Herod Philip was given the territory Gaulanitis – (known today as the Golan Heights), Batanaca, (the territory east of the Jordan River and the sea of Galilee), and Trachonitis and Auranitis, (the southern part of modern-day Syria). Josephus wrote that Philip was moderate and quiet in the conduct of his life and government.
- The third son of Herod the Great was Herod Antipas, the Herod before whom Christ stood in Luke 23: 8. The name Antipas is a combination of two Greek words – anti and pas. The word *anti* means *against* while the word *pas* means *all* or *everyone*. Once compounded into one word, it means *someone who is against everything and everyone*. The name alone should suggest the character of this particular individual against whom Pilate was in enmity. This was the Herod who married Herodias, the ex-wife of his brother Philip, and chopped off the head of a prophet as prize to a little girl who danced on his birthday. Even Jesus called him a “fox”.

If the mere presence of the Lord dissolved the enmity between Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, it is therefore strange that Born Again Christians could claim to belong to Jesus and harbor such contrary emotions one towards another. The logical conclusion is either both of them do not belong to Jesus, or one of them is a child of perdition. If Christ could, simply by His appearance, bring such peace and reconciliation to two wicked unbelievers like Herod and Pilate there is no reason for this work of the flesh to manifest in the life of any Christian.

## VARIANCE

There is an unfortunate term that is widely becoming the norm in most Pentecostal assemblies. It is glibly referred to as “church politics”. To be political,

according to Merriam Websters Dictionary means: “*competition between groups or individuals for power and leadership*” If one has had the unfortunate opportunity of witnessing ministers of the gospel play “politics” in the church, one would wish that God would move the way He did in the Old Testament, when the earth opened, and sowers of discord in the congregation of the Lord were swallowed alive.

The bitterness, meanness, and ruthlessness displayed and meted out by the evangelical politicians make the worldly politicians mild and cultured. The spirit of competition for position, influence, and power does not reflect in any way the character of Jesus Christ. One clear observation is that everything that Jesus Christ laid down as principles for his church on leadership, humility, sacrifice, servant hood, and so on, have been discarded by majority of the church leaders. Those principles of Christ are only mentioned in sermons and counseling sessions but are not necessarily the principles which govern the actions and conducts of most of the ministers of the gospel.

The word translated variance as a work of the flesh is the Greek word “*eris*”. The word is used in connection with political parties that have different platforms and agendas. It is also translated “party spirit”. “Eris” conveys the idea that the people in a particular group have different agendas and equally different interests to protect. It does not in any way suggest unity or oneness of purpose. In actual fact, it is the antonym of peace and unity.

Variance describes situations in which believers form cliques and factions in the church. When this ugly spirit takes over an assembly, loyalty to cliques and identification with interest groups become the yardstick for appointments, programs, promotions, as well as recognition. It is clearly a spirit that emanates from the lowest depth of hell.

The church as the body of Christ was fashioned by God to operate in unity and oneness even though it is made up of different people from different tribes, races, ethnic groups, different educational background, different social strata, and so

on. Christ brought different people from different background to form one body. The work of Christ is one of symbolism.

A symbol is an object that though different from another, stands as an acceptable representation of the foreign object. For example, a piece of cloth with green-white-green painted on it immediately conveys the presence or identity of the nation Nigeria. Wherever one sees that piece of cloth anywhere in the world, it says clearly, Nigeria is here. In essence, that flag is a symbol of Nigeria. Of course, Nigeria is bigger and more immense than that piece of cloth, yet, it is Nigeria wherever you see it. The same goes for corporate logos. Wherever one sees a three sided star in a circle, it says clearly, Mercedes Benz. It could be on a building, on a piece of paper, on a pen, or on a signboard in front of a forest. Wherever one sees the symbol, one knows, Mercedes Benz is there.

Symbolism is the antonym of diabolism. While symbolism takes two different objects and makes them one, diabolism takes two objects that are one and separates them. Symbolism creates unity, diabolism creates disunity. The ancient Greek actually referred to Lucifer as “diablos” from which we derive our English word, diabolical.

It is the working of “diablos” that makes a husband and wife, joined in matrimony to head for the law court to file for divorce. “Diablos” had operated in that home. When brethren who previously prayed, fasted, evangelized together suddenly start keeping distance from each other, it is clear “diablos” has visited that group.

Usually, the spirit of variance works through one individual who keeps recruiting more “workers” for “diablos”. Discerning congregations should immediately identify such individual and show him, or her, the door. Unfortunately, such diabolical individuals would have taken time to entrench themselves in the assembly and would have become leaders of opinion before launching the project of the devil. They are usually in the leadership team and would have systematically gathered a following and “loyalists”.

Even at that, the spiritually matured in the local assembly should quickly meet, identify the deceiver and the role he has come to play, and show him, or her, the door. In Romans 16:17-18, the Word of God says, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. [18] For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”*

When God says “mark” someone, it is an unequivocal instruction to pay attention to, watch, identify, and single out that particular individual. It is a task that must be done dispassionately, objectively and with spiritual surgical precision. If the discord sower is not “marked”, he would neutralize the move and the Presence of God in that fellowship.

Unfortunately, Christians oftentimes believe that they have more love and compassion than God. Believers who have set out to carry out this spiritual surgery on the body of Christ have often been labelled as being intolerant, lacking in love, lacking compassion, judgemental, holier than thou, and so on. What has been noticed from experience is that it is not the Holy Ghost speaking through these apologists, it is the devil. Satan does not want his agent neutralized, so he discourages reformers in the local assembly with fake statements of compassion. Those who are spiritually matured must not be deterred in identifying the agent of variance in the assembly and insist that he or she must look for another place of worship.

*1 Cor. 5:12-13 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? [13] But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

It is more dangerous after identifying them to allow them to stay on the basis of “he has repented”. When it comes to unity of the saints, the Lord does not accommodate slackness. No member of a body would work against the interest of the body. The foot would not work against the head. Even if he was an immature Christian who was manipulated by the devil to do the will of hell, it

would help him a lot if he is sent out of the fellowship. The lesson would help him to avoid falling into such a pit in future. If he is left to continue in the particular fellowship which he has sought to scatter and failed, he would do it again. The second time, he would be more careful and more cunning. Satan does not give up.

“Eris” depicts a bitterly mean spirit that is so consumed with its own self-interests and self-ambitions that it would split and divide than to admit it is wrong or give an inch to an opponent. The flesh would rather blow issues out of proportion and wreak havoc than to let a perceived opponent have his way.

It is unfortunate that most church splits are caused by this spirit and believers seem not be able to handle its destructive tendencies. It is futile to rely on the fire brigade after the house has been consumed by fire. It is wiser to prevent the fire from breaking out in the first place. Believers would do well to heed the admonition of the Word of God to identify the trouble maker before he takes root. Once he is identified, pluck him out. After all, “every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”

Believers should resist this work of the flesh. Do not be the agent of “diablos”. Satan has no future.

## EMULATIONS

To emulate means “to strive to equal or excel”. Oftentimes youths are admonished to emulate the virtues in an older person who could serve as a positive role model. However, it takes on a more sinister meaning when considered as a work of the flesh because to emulate also indicates to compete.

Consider this true life story, and wonder if a Christian could actually do something like this. It took place in a church in Nigeria.

The pastor of this rural parish had been serving for a few years in this particular location when suddenly he received a letter of transfer. Of course, very few

people welcome transfer from a ministry location, particularly when the minister is just beginning to “settle down” and “stabilize”. To add to the chagrin of this pastor, he planted corn in the pastorate premises and the stalks were high and the corn cob was just forming. Of course, the transfer straightaway meant that the incoming pastor will harvest the corn that he planted. Without any hesitation, the outgoing pastor brought out his cutlass, and cut down all the corn stalks. None was spared.

After completing this vindictive exercise, he started packing to move to the new location. A few days after, before he vacated the pastorate, another letter arrived from the Headquarters advising him to disregard the earlier instruction on the transfer. The exercise has been deferred and he should remain in his present station!

The word emulations as a work of the flesh is derived from the Greek word “zelos”. It often denotes enthusiasm, fervor, passion, devotion or an eagerness to achieve something. It also means covet (earnestly), (have) desire, (move with) envy, be jealous over, (be) zealous (-ly affect). The word zeal is derived from “zelos”.

In a negative sense, it portrays someone upset because another person achieved more or received more. The “zelos” fellow is jealous, envious, resentful, and filled with ill will for that person who got what he desired to have. As a result of this ill feeling, the jealous individual is irritated, angry, infuriated, annoyed, provoked and fuming.

In some rather extreme cases, the feeling of resentment is so bad it is accompanied with stomach ache, headache, ulcer, or migraine. It is what Nigerians refer to as “bad belle”. That is emulations, the work of the flesh.

Why should a fellow be irritated that someone got more or that someone else is more gifted than him? Unfortunately, it is an emotion that is very real in the church, particularly amongst ministers of the gospel. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, ministry breakthroughs, including the shoes pastors wear to ministers’ conference



have been known to cause resentment and envy among servants of Christ.

If this negative emotion is not checked with the Word of God, John 3: 27 *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven*, the aggrieved individual will set in motion a series of attacks that will become root of bitterness and defile many in the church. A lot of the crises in the body of Christ have at their root envy over what another believer has received from the Lord. Why should anyone in his right sense envy another believer? How about what they have that other people do not have?

*1 Cor. 4:7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

This was the spirit behind the action of the brothers of Joseph in selling him to Egypt. *Acts 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy (zeloo), sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.* Joseph suffered immensely because of the envy of his brethren. If God had not stepped in and turned it into victory, the life of Joseph would have been ruined. The exact result of what Joseph suffered is the product of this negative emotion when it is allowed to fester and operate.

Apart from causing ill-feeling in the body of Christ, it is a weakness of character for a man to fall sick as a result of success in the life of another individual. Whoever carries this attitude could be rightly classified as a weak human being who has no control over his spirit. It reminds one of the weaknesses of character in the life of King Saul.

Anyone who notices this negative emotion should strive to overcome it because it can push a person to do or say what he will later regret in life. The next time the flesh wants to manifest this obnoxious tendency in you, thank God for what He has done in the life of the person you are tempted to envy, remembering John 3: 27.

## WRATH

The Greek word translated wrath is “thumos” and it pictures someone furious and boiling with anger about something. On the surface, the fellow may appear calm, even friendly, but inwardly, he is raging. The fellow is concealing fierce anger with a veneer of calmness and sometimes, friendliness, but there is war raging on the inside of him.

The wrathful fellow keeps his anger below the surface and suppresses it, but once in a while, like a raging volcano, he loses control and erupts. People who manifest this work of the flesh are difficult to relate to because one does not know when they are offended. The deceptive exterior of calmness belies the fury within and that makes it difficult for people to know when they have stepped on their toes.

It is true that people get offended. There is scarcely a human being who does not get offended. The Lord made it clear that it is impossible for offences not to come. (Luke 17: 1) However, when one is offended, the right Christian attitude is to immediately open up to the offender and express the hurt. Often times, those who offend us are not even aware that they have done something wrong. At other times, people could innocently do or say things without meaning any harm at all. A Christ-like believer should immediately call attention to the misdeed in a spirit of calmness and gentleness. Such sincere opening up usually makes friendship stronger and fellowship sweeter.

Unfortunately, the wrathful individual pretends not to be hurt, yet inwardly, he is raging. He keeps the hurt and starts nursing it until it germinates into a root of bitterness. Rather than open up to the offender or take it to the Lord, if the offender cannot be approached, he keeps it bottled under while the fury keeps building up pressure. Over a period of time, the poison that has been fermenting on the inside begins to escape through the tongue because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. When believers begin to make derogatory statements and caustic remarks about other believers, they have “thumos” on the

inside. Such poison can scatter fellowships and create wounds that are difficult to heal.

Even though the word of God makes it clear that self-control is a virtue, an offended person keeping the hurt bottled up cannot be said to be exercising self-control. He has neither overlooked the offence nor forgiven the offender. He is merely pretending to be calm. If keeping calm under provocation is a Christian virtue, then air hostesses and salesmen are the best Christians in the world. No matter how provoked they are, they maintain a cool and calm exterior.

It is ironical that God allows offences to come our way for a purpose. Oftentimes, we praise ourselves that we are perfect Christians because we have been in the Lord for a number of years and have been dedicated workers in the church. Meanwhile, God sees that a lot of character flaws still exist within us making us imperfect in His presence. In an act of grace, He allows situations in which we are provoked so that our reaction would show us how weak we are in overcoming the flesh.

Whenever such situations occur, we usually turn around and blame the offender for provoking us to wrath. Statements such as, "I am sorry for the way I behaved. That man provoked me." No, that man did not provoke you; that man exposed you. That provocation served to bring to the surface what was lying under, in the depth of your being. Many believers would not agree even if God told them that they are not peaceful but wrathful, violent not gentle, rough and not calm. So, God permits someone to press the right button, and immediately, the carnal nature that is suppressed jumps to the surface and asserts itself.

A good illustration may suffice at this point. Let us consider a bottle of Fanta beverage. This soft drink is sweetness personified. Let us assume that the bottle containing the drink is shaken violently and forcefully dashed to the ground. Of course, the bottle will shatter into pieces. After such abusive treatment, if one were to taste the liquid splattered on the wall and on the ground, would it be sweet or it would become bitter like lime? Of course, it would still remain sweet

because the sweetness on the inside was not affected by the external abusive treatment.

In like manner, if we have sweetness on the inside of us, no amount of abuse or abusive treatment would cause us to become foul or grouchy. True character is revealed under pressure. We should see every provocation and offence as an opportunity to prove that we are truly regenerated and are living in the newness of life by the Spirit of God.

Keeping things under does not solve problems; neither does it make problems disappear. The way of the flesh is to avoid confronting problems so that it can continue to fester into hatred and enmity. The best way to avoid falling into the sin of wrath is to heed the commandment of the Lord in Matt. 18: 15-17.

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. [16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

The Lord has given specific instruction on how we should handle offences. If an individual is offended, the first person he should inform is the perceived offender. If the problem is not solved at that point, then the hurting fellow is permitted by the Lord to inform two or three members of the church about the incident. He is not just to inform them, they should go with him to meet the perceived offender. If at this point also, it is not resolved, then the issue can now be brought to the attention of the church.

Usually, when one takes a conflict to the perceived offender, it is resolved at that level. What offends one person may not be seen as an offence by the other party. At that level, the conflict is usually resolved. Even if it is not resolved at that level, once two or three other people intervene, they are able to provide a third party view of the situation and reconcile the two opposing brethren.

In view of this provision, there is no reason why any Christian should be wrathful because the Lord has made adequate provision in His word for us to deal with such offences. The spiritually matured way to resolve problems is to confront it quickly before it defiles many people and the root of bitterness spread.

This method of instant confrontation is the example that Paul laid in Galatians 2:14 *“But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”*

The moment Peter mis-conducted himself, Paul immediately confronted him in the presence of the other brethren, rebuked and corrected him. The instant correction stopped hypocrisy from spreading among the brethren and it must have cautioned Peter that he should not repeat the same mistake.

The opposite of this spiritual standard is what is observed in the church today. Who would dare confront an elder or a senior pastor that has openly misbehaved? It was easier in the days of Paul. In those days, the believers saw themselves as brethren, members of an equal brotherhood. In this generation, not content with dividing the church along the lines of clergy and laity, church leaders have introduced an idolatrous twist into church segregation in which church leaders are “daddies”, “mummies”, “fathers in the Lord”, and the people of God have become the “children” of the spiritual leaders.

How many children have the nerve to rebuke their fathers in public? It is an abomination. So, the people of God are intimidated into ungodly reverence of their “brothers” who in actual fact are their Father’s stewards. People see things that are wrong in the church, but they cannot speak, because it was approved by “daddy”. So, a lot of resentment, disapproval and misgivings, are bottled up by the members of the church and wrath keeps building up. The day wrath erupts, the fellowship scatters.

Would it not have been better to have heeded the command of the Lord?

*Matthew 23: 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*

*Matthew 23: 8 ... and all ye are brethren.*

*Mark 10:44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

Let us imagine this scenario for a moment. A father went on a long journey and left his children in the care of his first son. No sooner had the father left the house that his older son issued laws of his own. He must be called “daddy” by his siblings since he is taking care of them and the father’s treasures are in his care. Any of the children who refused to accord him the title “daddy” will receive a serious tongue lashing on home training. In addition, whatever they are entitled to from their father would not be released since they are “rebellious, stubborn, and lack respect”. When the father of the children return from his trip, having full knowledge of what his older son had done, would he hug him and pat him on the back with “well done, thou good and faithful son”?

The Lord Jesus Christ, Who in actual fact paid for our spiritual re-birth and has every right to call us His children, when He rose from the dead, He did not take the liberty to call Himself “Father”. He told Mary -

*John 20:17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.*

The Lord refers to us as His brethren and acknowledged that we both have one Father; and He is in heaven. If the Lord rejected the title “father”, because it is exclusive to God in the church, why would any minister of the gospel accept it?

One common reason given by people for this practice is that apostle Paul called himself father in many instances and referred to different people as his children. I meditated on this and the clarification I received is, “show one instance in the scriptures where Holy Spirit recorded that one saint called Paul ‘father’”. There is none. Holy Spirit did not record a single instance in which one saint called Paul

father. Neither is there any other instance in which any New Testament saint called any other apostle or leader 'father'. This is consistent with the command of the Lord, "call no man your father upon the earth". The implication is this, any man can call himself what he likes, but do not recognize such self appointed titles. The scriptures cannot be broken.

Another reference point is John, the receiver of the book of Revelations. In conveying the Revelations to the church, he described himself as, "*I John, who also am your brother,...*" Rev. 1:9. It is believed that John died a natural death at the age of 100. Bearing in mind that he was very old when he received the revelation, it implies that he was an old man when he introduced himself as "brother" to the church.

It could have been permissible for this aberration to exist in the household of God if the Lord had NOT issued any categorical statement on it. However, since the Lord Jesus made a definite statement, "**call no man your father upon the earth**" doing it amounts to disobeying the Lord. One has no disagreement with giving honor to whom honor is due, but is it right to honor man and dishonor God? Even in the world, if a country has a President, anyone in that country who refers to himself as "president" shall be charged with treason.

It is also pertinent to mention the reference to the king in the Old Testament who called Elisha "my father" –

*2 Kings 13:14 Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.*

Yes, the Old Testament saints many times referred to their leaders as fathers. Even the Lord referred to Abraham as "father Abraham" in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. What should be borne in mind is that in Matt. 23: 9, the Lord was giving instruction to the New Testament saint, and not the Old Testament saint. Apparently it was this OT characteristic that Paul and John displayed in their epistles when they variously referred to other saints as their

children.

However, it should be pointed out that in referring to Abraham as a father in the New Testament, the scripture was careful to identify him as “our father in the flesh.” Romans 4:1 *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?* Abraham was identified as a biological father, and not a spiritual father. Only God, is identified as spiritual father, (Heb. 12: 9) and that title is exclusive to the Most High alone.

Mixing up Old Testament commands with New Testament commands is one serious problem that has hindered the progress and effectiveness of the people of God throughout the history of the church. Schofield in his Bible commentary referred to is as the “Judaizing” of the New Testament church. This is a practice whereby Judaism doctrines and commands are applied to the church in utter disregard of specific New Testament doctrines. It is this Judaizing of the church that is behind the prosperity message and most of the vindictive “my enemies must die” prayers in the church.

The bottom-line is that the church is made up of equal brotherhood. The Lord Himself identified with us as brethren. Therefore, everyone in the church should be opened to correction and rebuke, irrespective of position and title. If people are unwilling or unable to express their grievances, the tendency is for such hurt to be suppressed and bottled down on the inside. Keeping anger bottled within leads to malice which in due course shall produce wrath. Restoring fellowship after such outbursts of anger is seldom easy.

## STRIFE

The next work of the flesh is derived from the Greek word “eritheia”. As can be noticed, it is similar to the word “eris” which is translated variance.

“Eritheia” refers to a self-seeking ambition that is more concerned about itself and the fulfilment of its own wants, desires and pleasures than in meeting the



same need in others. The fellow consumed by this work of the flesh will say anything; sacrifice any standard, (secular or sacred), rules or relationships to achieve his goals. In the world, it is justified by the phrase, “the end justifies the means”.

Those who subscribe to this phrase are usually selfish and ruthless people who will stop at nothing to achieve personal ambition and self aggrandizement. In the process of pursuing personal ambition they leave behind battered emotions of other people and lives wrecked and disoriented due to their blind insensitivity to the needs in other peoples lives. This attitude is selfish, self-focused and engrossed with its own desires and aspirations.

Any assembly that has someone like this will always have strife and division. A marriage that has a spouse who manifests this tendency will seldom have peace. When people are only concerned with their needs and ambitions and refuse to acknowledge the same need in other people, they become petulant and quarrelsome unless they have their way. The strife that is produced as a result of this work of the flesh is based on a self-centred ambition that seeks to manipulate and coerce others into submission.

Unfortunately, some professing Christians manifest this unholy attitude. They only think of themselves and would stop at nothing to achieve their desire. A number of fellowships have disintegrated due to the unbridled ambition of an individual who so much coveted a position or title. To achieve his nefarious objective, he proceeded to spread slander and raise followers. In a characteristic satanic move, the entire assembly is thrown into confusion and discord replaces accord.

One has equally heard of marriages in which the woman wanted more money or other material things from the husband. When the required amount or item was not forthcoming, the woman became irritable and quarrelsome. The smile on her face was replaced by a frown and conversation with the husband was reduced to monosyllable. “Yes”. “No”. “Um”. Many Christian homes are standing only

because the Lord commanded that there should be no divorce. Strife begets strife, and frowns multiply frowns particularly when the partner sees no sense in the demand. Of course, there is usually no sense in someone blinded by selfish ambition and desires. The amounts of strife that personal unbridled desires and aspirations have produced in Christian homes are not complimentary to the Lord at all.

Strife is a serious problem, not only in the church, but also in Christian homes and Christian partnerships. Every believer should endeavour to put the interest of other people first. The scriptures admonish in Philip. 2:3-4 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. [4] Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

The only way out of strife is for each believer to place the interest of other people first. In every relationship, seek not your own interest, but the interest of other people. When this becomes the attitude of everyone, selfish ambition will die a natural death. But so long as there are people who are only happy whenever they get what they want, there will always be strife.

If you find yourself only concerned about your projects and dreams, and never bother to ask or feel concerned about other people's dreams and aspirations, you need to check your life and allow God to deal with selfishness in you. It is the nature of the flesh to be self-centred and self-consumed.

Whenever one meets people who only talk about their achievements, parents who only talk about their children, pastors that only talk about their congregations, people who talk about their achievements or possessions once they hear of other people's achievements, then one is most likely looking at an individual that is full of strife. Every Christian assembly should be alert to identify anyone with this spirit and join hands to resist this work of the flesh, or else, it shall rip them apart.

## SEDITIONS

The word translated seditions is from the Greek word “dichostasia” which is a combination of “dicha” and “statis”. “Dicha” means apart, separation, while “statis” means to stand or to rebel. It portrays an individual who stands apart, as one who rebels and steps away from someone to whom he should have been loyal. Seditions give the impression of disloyalty.

It is true that some ministers of the gospel go into excesses in their conducts and manner of living. The misconduct of some ministers of the gospel does not negate the fact that the Lord has appointed leaders for His people and He expects loyalty to these delegated authorities. Every believer is expected to have an under-shepherd who watches over his soul (Heb. 13: 17). Loyalty and submission to these God appointed leaders is one of the prerequisites for a closer walk with the Holy Spirit.

However, the flesh hates rules, regulations and any order that is imposed on it. When one makes reference to the origin of the flesh, it can easily be seen why it hates rules and order. The close association between the flesh and Satan is enough indication of the response of the flesh to authority. Satan is a rebellious and chaotic entity, and whatever is associated with him cannot be orderly and submissive.

Most of the conflicts in the world are due to the flesh rejecting constituted authority. As shall be discussed in detail in later chapters, every authority comes from God. Whosoever rejects constituted authority rejects God and not man.

*Romans 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. [2] Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

God is the only authority in the universe and He exercises His authority on the

earth directly and indirectly. Most of the time, God chooses to exercise His authority indirectly through delegated authority. Whoso then, rebels against a delegated authority, as pointed out in the passage above, rebels against God and the result is damnation. It is clear that the opposite of salvation is damnation. No matter how well one performs in other areas, rebellion to God's appointed leader can jeopardize one's salvation.

Every heaven bound child of God should resist the carnal desires of rebelling against Godly authority. At times, the provocation to do so is very strong, but one should wait on the Lord for clear directions before taking any drastic action. Any action that is not consistent with the perfect will of the Almighty God shall be deemed an act of rebellion.

It is also important for believers to identify carnal and rebellious entities within the church. There are people, as identified previously in variance and strife, whose main intention is to draw followers after them in the church in order to satisfy their selfish and self-centred nature. These people have led many innocent people astray and caused them to wander from their God appointed leaders. Every believer should exercise discernment and identify those who cause divisions in the church. As made clear in *Romans 16: 17-18* *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. [18] For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

## HERESIES

The Greek word "hairesis" carries the idea of a person or group of people who are sectarian. The word sectarian refers to a group of people who adhere to the same doctrine or who ardently follow the same leader. According to the Merriam Webster's Dictionary, to be sectarian, amongst others, implies to be heretical, dissident, heterodox, nonconformist, schismatic, and unorthodox.

In the early church, there were groups of people considered unauthorized because they were not submitted to the authority of the church leadership. What was considered heresies in those days could best be described in today's language as "cliques" within the church. This refers to groups of people who believe that they are exclusive. It also conveys the idea of division and factions.

According to Dake's commentary, "The word itself (heresies) has no evil meaning. It simply refers to a doctrinal view or belief at variance with the recognized and accepted tenets of a system, church, or party. The word heretic is used once in Scripture (Titus 3:10), and means one who holds a heresy; a dissenter, nonconformist. It only takes on an evil meaning when sound doctrine is rejected and fallacy is accepted and taught in preference to truth. If the doctrine is unsound and one dissents from the main body who holds the fallacy, then he is a heretic in a good sense."

The word signifies a sect or party, whether good or bad, distinguished from all other sects and parties. It formerly was applied to different sects of heathen philosophers. The church of Rome uses it only in an evil sense to apply to all who cannot go along with their many dogmas and rituals that have been added for many centuries to the pure teachings of the Christian faith. A heretic to them is one who is not a papist, and because of this is outside the Christian religion. Most of all denominations use it in this same sense of those who do not see eye to eye with them. True Christians apply it to all false religions who do not accept the true Christian doctrines. Jews called Christians a sect (Acts 24:5,14; Acts 28:22) and Christians called the Pharisees and Sadducees and other groups sects (Acts 5:17; Acts 15:5; Acts 26:5). All deviation from truth is heresy.[\[12\]](#)

Paul warned in *Acts 20:29-31* *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. [30] Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

That warning still rings true today as more ministries spring up almost on a daily basis. In an attempt to build congregations, existing congregations have been

splintered on the basis of doctrinal differences or on the basis of superior revelation. As Dake concluded, “all deviation from truth is heresy.” If every believer holds to the truth of the word of God, there shall be no division whatsoever in the church, as the truth shall hold everyone together.

A number of unbroken ministers spearhead most of these heretical occurrences in the body of Christ. Unless an individual permits the cross of Jesus to work deeply in his life, one would easily find reasons to be puffed up and haughty. It is only a life that has been dealt with by the power of the cross that can be submissive and lowly minded. The flesh delights in being puffed up, prideful, and boastful.

It is the nature of the flesh to segregate and only associate with those that meet its discriminatory criteria. This attitude is opposed to teachings of the Lord and as the scriptures reveal, God resists those who engage in such prideful discriminations.

Every believer should avoid associating with divisive elements within the body of Christ. Division, on whatever criteria, is a work of the flesh. God is no respecter of persons. On the contrary, He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. The flesh on the other hand enjoys thinking too highly of itself. It adores being selfish, self –consumed, and it takes pride in protecting selfish interests.

*1 Cor. 4:7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

## ENVYING AND MURDER

It is interesting to note that in the original Greek text, the word “murder” did not appear as a work of the flesh. The conclusion of some Bible scholars is that the translators of the Bible added murder immediately after envying because of the serious nature of this work of the flesh. Whoever engages in envying, as described as a work of the flesh, is capable of committing murder.

The Greek word “phthonos” translated envying depicts a hostile feeling toward someone because that person has something that the other person does not possess but would like to have. It could be a title, a position, a benefit, or an advantage. This negative feeling is so strong that the envious fellow takes action to remove that person and scheme to have that benefit pass to him.

It is ugly, ruthless, greedy and covetous. This kind of envy is also sinister, malicious, and it is usually accompanied by manipulations and conspiracies that defile the body of Christ. It sounds unreal that Christians can go to this length to actualize personal ambition, but it actually takes place in the church. It is similar to emulations and variance described earlier in this book. Most of the politickings observed in the church have envy at their root.

The Bible makes it clear that the Jews killed Jesus because of this type of envy.

*Matthew 27:17-18 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? [18] For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

*Mark 15:9-10 But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? [10] For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.*

Finnis Dake describes it as “Pain, ill will, and jealousy at the good fortune or blessings of another; the most base of all degrading and disgraceful passions.” As mentioned earlier, this may be the reason why Bible translators felt murder should naturally follow this kind of base passion.

People have been known to lie, deceive, and forge documents, to get a position or promotion in the church. It is unbelievable, but it is real. Whoever permits Satan to sow this evil seed in him will end up losing favour with God and man.

Another usage of “phthonos” in classical literature is of someone who uses others as stepping stone to achieve his ambition to acquire money, power or position. As common as this evil behaviour is in the world, it has also, through the flesh, crept into the church. It is a common practise with politicians in the world,

particularly when they are canvassing for votes from the electorate.

A minister of the gospel once said, “use your ministry to build people, do not use people to build your ministry”. The ruthlessness with which some people pursue “success” in the ministry is alarming. Very few ministers of the gospel see ministry as a platform to serve and make sacrifices for the expansion of the kingdom of God. From careful observations, ministry is perceived in most quarters as a means of livelihood. The ungodly behaviour of diverting tithes and offerings to satisfy the earthly indulgence of the “man of God” has created credibility crisis for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those who engage in these covetous practises are not using their ministries to build people, they are using the people. Jesus did not go to the cross to make any minister of the gospel a superstar. He laid the example of servant hood for His people to follow.

The unfortunate thing is that most members of the church have copied the greed and covetousness of these undisciplined and unbroken leaders. There was the case of this Bishop who built a 21-bedroom mansion. Where did the money come from? Of course, it came from the church. He lived a flamboyant lifestyle as if he was a Hollywood movie star.

One day, he received a letter from an extortioner demanding one million Naira ransom or else the Bishop would be killed. Of course, if you had a 21-bedroom mansion, you would not be in a hurry to leave planet earth. So, the Bishop paid. Where did the money come from? Where else, since the Bishop has no other “business” but the church?

A few weeks later, another letter arrived. One million Naira or the man of God will return to God. Apparently, the man of God was not willing to return to God, yet. He paid. However, the tension and the fear took its toll on the Bishop and he broke down. For security reasons, he chose to go to the Military hospital to recuperate. Right there, another demand notice arrived. This time around, the soldiers volunteered to deliver the one million naira ransom. They laid ambush



for the extortioner and were able to arrest him.

When they took him to the Bishop for identification, the man of God nearly had cardiac arrest on his sick bed. It was the Head of the Prayer Band!

Now, who would you blame of greed? Should one blame the Head of the Prayer Band or the Bishop who gave him the bad example to follow?

In a town in Nigeria, the residents call church “shop”. Whenever a new church opens in the town, the town’s people say, “They have opened another shop”. The congregation of the people of God is now seen as a house of merchandise; the exact opposite of what the Lord said.

Visit most of the big denominations today, it is business galore. Every thing about the church has been commercialized. Special programs are business exhibitions, from sales of stickers to gift items, various Bible translations, brochures, food, drinks, t-shirts, bags, scarves, and so on, are on sale.

What are the justifications for all these businesses?

- You need money to preach the gospel
- Ye shall remember the Lord thy God, He giveth thee power to get wealth ...

No, the real reason is seldom mentioned. It is envy. The people of God envy what the world gives its children. Pastors have been heard to say, “if the unbeliever can have this, King’s kids should have more.” One even says, “if you don’t want the money, tell God to give it to me.”

Watchman Nee said, “Only when Christians have learned to be satisfied with all their portion in Christ will they be able to overcome those things that the world has to offer. As long as they are satisfied with those things that the world has to offer, they are not satisfied with Christ.”

Unfortunately, the people of God flock to pastors who teach and preach that earthly wealth is the result of divine favour. If God loves you, you must be rich.

They ignore the warning in 1 Tim. 6:5 *Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.* The very people that God commands believers to avoid, are the very people that the people flock to in large numbers. What did God say should be the reaction of the believer to earthly wealth?

*1 Tim. 6:6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain. [7] For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. [8] And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

Envy. It plays out in different ways; but the result is the same - eternal destruction.

Every heaven bound child of God must avoid this work of the flesh. It is base and degrading. Instead of wasting emotion fighting what another person has, why not concentrate energy and passion on doing the will of God? Of course, envy is a passion set on fire by hell. It is for the reason of envy that Satan ended up in hell. He too, envied the Most High and schemed to get the throne of God. He failed and ended up in shame and disgrace. In like manner, everyone who manifests this evil passion will end up. Avoid it.

## DRUNKENNESS

The word drunkenness as a work of the flesh is derived from the Greek word “methe”. This directly refers to strong drink or to drunkenness. Historically, in the first century, consumption of wine was a key factor in pagan religion, particularly the pagan worship of Bacchus.

Alcohol, like drugs, breaks down the mental barrier of an individual and makes the fellow easily accessible for demonic invasion. Evil spirits find it easy to invade someone under the influence of alcohol or hard drugs. When an individual absorbs wine, the person loses his ability to think rationally, often leading to devastating excesses. Most of the acts of immorality and licentiousness

that people commit are often done under the influence of alcohol.

*Ephes. 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*

One has encountered individuals who claim that the Bible sanctions consumption of wine and they proceed to quote *1 Tim. 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*

It should be pointed out that the Bible mentions two types of wines:

- The fermented or intoxicating kind, called strong drink (Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:11,22; Isaiah 24:9; Isaiah 28:7; Isaiah 29:9), and the
- Unfermented or non-intoxicating kind like grape juice. Even juice in the cluster was called wine in those days. In Isaiah 65:8 we read, "the new wine is found in the cluster," and we can be sure this would not be the kind to make anyone drunk.

The advice of Paul to Timothy was for dietary purposes to maintain good health, not necessarily to indulge in drunkenness. Greeks often mixed water with wine, about one part wine and two to three parts water. It was held in those days that constantly drinking water injured the stomach. Paul here gives him permission to use a little wine mixed with water for his health.[\[13\]](#)

The water situation at that time may have had something to do with this advice to Timothy also. In Asia Minor the water came mainly from cisterns which became stagnant at certain seasons.

It would be wrong for a Christian to indulge in drunkenness in view of the command in Eph. 5: 18. Being filled with alcohol is a sure way of inviting demons to enter and inhabit the individual. Therefore, God commands a better way of life, "be filled with the Holy Ghost". Which one is better, to be filled with demons or to be filled with the Spirit of God?

A mind that is filled with alcohol will think irrationally, act irresponsibly, and commit acts of excesses that he would not have contemplated. Once a man is under the influence of alcohol, the flesh has every opportunity to fully express

itself. The consequences of such expression are never Godly or commendable. It is better to heed the instruction of God.

## REVELLINGS

The Greek word “komoi” describes a festive procession or merry making. When the word “komoi” is applied to the work of the flesh, it describes an individual who cannot bear the thought of being bored. The fellow is constantly seeking different forms of amusement or entertainment. The person is light in the spirit and all his contemplation is on what to do next to have fun or be entertained.

Unfortunately, many ministries cater to this attitude under the guise of making church interesting for people to continue to attend. In some instances, Christianity has become entertainment.

What would one say of ministries that copy patterns of the world for special programs? What would sober minded Christians say about believers’ celebration of Valentine’s Day in an attempt to reach unbelievers? Of course, the underlying reason is to reach out to unbelievers, but how many believers would agree to carry a masquerade in an attempt to reach idol worshippers? Or participate in witchcraft rituals in order to save the soul of witches?

2 Tim. 3: 4 warns that in the last days, people would be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”. The conclusion of that verse says, “from such turn away”. The term “lovers of pleasures” is the Greek word “philedonos”, which is compound of “philos” which means to love, and “hedone” which means something that tastes sweet or something that is pleasant or enjoyable. According to Rick Renner, it denoted “the exaltation of pleasure, signified by freedom to sexually express oneself.” There was no moral standard with “hedonism”.

“Hedone” is used five times in the New Testament to describe unrestricted seeking of carnal pleasures. It is true that Christ has given us liberty and the scriptures commanded us to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made

us free. However, the word of God equally commands in Galatians 5:13 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

The modesty and soberness that should characterize Christianity is missing in the life of many professing Christians. The situation in most assemblies, even in certain denominations is “anything goes”. If such unbridled revelling is called to order, the response usually is “it doesn’t matter”. Some go far to say, “it is for liberty that Christ has called me”.

By using “philedonos”, God’s word tells us that in the last days, people will be preoccupied with pleasures and entertainment. The concept of liberty in Christ has been stretched to breaking point to accommodate condemnable moral permissiveness in the body of Christ. Almost every fashion of the world has been imported into the church under the guise of “liberty in Christ”.

The word of God opposes such permissiveness and calls all those indulging it to order. *1 Peter 4:3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:* Every heaven bound child of God must demonstrate moderation in every sphere of life. God does not approve of revellings.

*Romans 13:13-14 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. [14] But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

The flesh hates discipline and order. The flesh does not want any form of responsibility. The desire of the flesh is to escape being responsible and disciplined while it is free to thrive on fun and avoid any form of seriousness in life.

The excuse that church must not be boring is not tenable. There can be no boredom if one’s life is focused on meeting the needs in other people’s lives.

Once an individual is self focused, and only sees his needs and problems, very quickly boredom will set in. However, if one were to look outwards, and see the orphans, drug addicts, prostitutes, beggars, widows, abandoned children, prisoners, the deaf, the dumb and the blind, and all the problems that these and other group of people face, boredom will fly out fast. There are so many Godly things one can do without seeking personal gratification and earthly indulgence.

## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [23] Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

Eating fruit is a wonderful and tasty experience because fruits are nourishing and come in different flavours. Our diet is balanced with fruits. However, fruit is only useful and delicious when it is matured, or as it is commonly called, ripe. An unripe fruit sets the teeth on edge, upsets the stomach, and often times makes the eater nauseous. This immediately implies that whosoever shall manifest the fruit of the Spirit must be a “ripe” or matured Christian.

God wants our lives to nourish other people and thereby be a reflection of His nature. Since man has no goodness in himself, God credited His righteousness to us through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not surprising that God also wants us to adopt the virtues of the Holy Spirit so that our behaviour can be a reflection of His own.

Every fruit is produced by a tree to which it is attached and every tree is produced from a seed. The determining factor in the flavour and type of the fruit is not the tree, but the seed. It is the seed that produces the tree which in turn bears fruit.

When the above analogy is applied to the Christian life, it is clear that attention must be paid to the “seed” in the believer’s life, because that is what will ultimately determine the fruit the believer will produce. 1 Pet. 1: 23 *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and*

*abideth for ever.* The Word of God makes it clear that the word is the seed. *Luke 8: 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.* The seed that will provide the fruit which God wants to see is the word of God.

At the point of conversion, the word the new convert hears is more than salvation message; a seed is actually being sown into his spirit. This seed will continue to grow into a tree and at the right time will begin to bear fruit. The fruit that will manifest in the life of the believer will be a reflection of the seed sown at the point of conversion. At that point of fruit bearing, people express dissatisfaction with character and conduct of the Christian not realizing that the problem actually started with the salvation message that was sown into him.

In the competitive bid to have church members, some ministers have deviated from the pure word of the gospel message and proceeded to play on the earthly fears, desires, and ambitions of people. Most salvation messages do not focus on the purpose for which Christ came. In many instances, Jesus is portrayed as a do-gooder Who has come to provide employment, pay debts, give the fruit of the womb, give wealth, provide marriage partner, heal sicknesses, give good sleep at night, and so on. Even though all these interventions are part of the working of God in the lives of men, they are not the main reason why Jesus came.

If getting fruit of the womb, getting a job, or getting a marriage partner is what Jesus does in people's lives, then, unbelievers have no problem by not coming to Jesus. Without Jesus in their lives, Muslims give birth; in fact more than Christians, Buddhists (Chinese) and Hindus (Indians) have the largest population on earth, and they have wealth and create wealth, and so on.

When ministers sow the seed of covetousness in people and on the basis of that bring them to the Lord, little do they realize that they have done the Lord a disservice. At the point that the people should begin to bear fruit for the kingdom of God, the seed in them will produce carnal works of the world. The only word that can act as the correct seed to produce the fruit of the Spirit is the pure unadulterated word of God on salvation.

Ray Comfort in his remarkable message titled HELL'S BEST KEPT SECRET pointed out that the key to obtaining genuine conversion is to convict the sinner of his sin by God's standard before he can make a quality and soul saving commitment to accept the Lord. The usual message of "Jesus will give you love, joy, peace, fulfillment and lasting happiness"[\[14\]](#) is a wrong presentation of the gospel message. Not only is it unimpressive to any observant unbeliever, (because many unbelievers have all these things without accepting Christ as Lord and Savior), it equally falls short of the mark of the gospel. Such messages would impress an unbeliever in distress and desperate for solution, but would have no impact on a comfortable unbeliever.

Because of such incomplete salvation messages, most pastors are shepherding backsliders. These are people though they are regular in the church do not present any fragrance of Christ. In words and in deeds, there is no difference between them and the unbelievers. They have the same fears of the unbelievers, the same ambition, the same lusts, similar attitudes and equal mode of behavior.

Ray Comfort cited the example of a major denomination in the United States of America that over a period of time has amassed 294,000 decision cards for Christ but had only 14,000 people in fellowship. In effect, this denomination could not account for 280,000 souls. What happened? The multitude were not converted, they merely filled "Decision Card".

A. B. Earl said, "I have found by long experience that the severest threatening of the law have a prominent place in leading men to Christ. They must see themselves lost before they will cry for mercy; they'll not escape danger until they see it."

In his article "Why are we shy with the Gospel?", Sam Kputu of CAPRO (Calvary Ministries) identified faulty foundation as one of the problems. According to Bro. Sam, "the gospel that 'brought' many to Christ is defective. It is centered on their needs, expectations and fears, not on Christ."[\[15\]](#)

Before men can, in truth, accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they must first



be made to see and accept that they are sinners in need of a Savior, and not a poor man in need of millions or a barren woman in need of a child. *Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.* When a man sees his spiritual condition and acknowledges that his soul is damned, then, he would appreciate the Savior Who came to redeem him. Such an individual will accept the standard of the fruit of the Spirit knowing fully well that any manifestation of the works of the flesh implies a return to damnation.

How can this conviction come? According to the word of God, the law of God is the standard of conviction.

*Galatians 3: 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

If you were to inform a man that Christ died for his sins and the man is convinced that he has no sin, what happens? The man would be offended that you are insulting him. On the other hand, if you were to utilize the standard of God of “thou shall not steal, lie, and commit adultery” and so on, the man will be speechless. No one can claim he has not committed any of these three sins. Jesus says that by looking at someone with lust, you have committed adultery already. So, on the Day of Judgment, what would you do? You need an Attorney and there is only One – Jesus Christ.

Consider this conversation between Ray Comfort and a fellow passenger aboard an aircraft:

Ray goes, “may I ask you some simple questions?”

“Sure, go ahead”

“Have you ever told a lie before?”

“Yeah. I guess so.”

“Have you ever taken anything that does not belong to you; maybe papers clip from the office?”

“Yeah”

“Have you ever committed adultery in your life? Maybe you have looked at another woman with lust in your heart?”

“Yeah, many times.”

“So, by your own admission, you are a liar, a thief, and an adulterer. So, tell me, what are you going to do when you stand in the Presence of the Holy God at the end of your life and you face judgment?” [\[16\]](#)

*Romans 3:20 ... for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

Unless people are confronted with sin in their lives, they will not appreciate Jesus Christ as Savior. The angel made clear in Matt 1: 21 the mission of the Lord, *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Mark Cahill in his book ONE THING YOU CAN'T DO IN HEAVEN adopted the method of making the unbeliever think of eternity. In the flurry of activities to make ends meet in the world, most people have lost consciousness of life after death. If people can be made to focus on what happens after death, in most instances, they will end up with Jesus Christ. The question of how death came in, in the first place, will be answered and the problem created by sin will be solved.

So, Mark goes something like this, “Excuse me, we are conducting a survey on what people think will happen after they die.” Most of the time, you will be given attention by the respondent.

“150 years from now, what would be the most important thing to you? Would it be your house, how much money you have in the bank, the number of cars you possess, the type of club you belong and the class of people you relate to?”

Of course, 150 years from now only one thing would matter to anyone – are you in heaven or are you in hell? So, the conversation opens and you can explain what sin has done to the human race and the redemption that Jesus Christ has

paid for. If the unbeliever is argumentative and insists that he is morally good, add the conviction of the law by Ray Comfort.

Another method we adopted was to make a card with a picture of fire, depicting hell, and another of glorious cloud with ascending steps, depicting heaven. The unbeliever is shown the card and politely asked, “100 years from now, where would you be?”

You can equally conduct another survey and seek people’s opinion on “why do people die?” Most respondents will say because they grow old. If that should be the case, children and youths should not die. If they respond it is because they fall sick, then those who are healthy should not die. Of course the answer is simply, “the wages of sin is death”. So, how sin came in becomes the issue while Jesus Christ appears as the solution.

Going on evangelism to preach prosperity, good life, peace, love and joy, does not hit the nail on the head. Remember, what the evangelist is aiming for is conviction of sin and repentance from sin. Evangelism is not an exercise aimed at making people happy; it should make people cry and be sober. *2 Cor. 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of...*

A very good example is found in Acts 2:37 *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* After the people were convicted with the word of truth, the evangelist gave them the solution: Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

The focus of the world is on prosperity, wealth, but no moral standard. Even bankers and insurance companies promise prosperity, peace and wealth to their customers. If the church promises the same things, then what is the difference between the world and the church? The mission of the church is to preach repentance from sin so that man can partake of the holiness of God. The world wants peace and wealth without moral responsibility to God, while the church

places moral responsibility first, and insist on it as a way of life.

Ministers of the gospel must not lose focus of the purpose of the gospel message. It is remission of sins. When people start Christianity fully persuaded that sin is an enemy, it will be difficult for them to return to it. However, when someone mounts the pulpit and tells people, “poverty is a curse”, and Jesus is the solution to poverty, the people remain in the church pursuing mammon. Was Paul under a curse? Was Peter under a curse?

God did not say that His people would be destitute on the earth. The Lord promised, John 14:18 *I will not leave you comfortless (orphans): I will come to you.* God promised to supply the needs of his people (Philip. 4: 19), but commanded His people to remain content with what they have. 1 Tim. 6: 6 *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* Whoever lacks Godly contentment cannot make heaven, because the opposite of contentment is covetousness. And, no one covetous or greedy shall inherit the kingdom of God.

The gospel message is forgiveness of sin and deliverance from sin. This is the seed that needs to be sown into the spirit of the new convert. The new convert knowing from the onset the consequence of returning to sin will reciprocate with holiness and obedience. The multitudes that have been packed into places of worship on the basis of receiving blessings by coming to the Lord have not been told the truth. As pointed out by this author in the book RETURN TO THE NARROW PATH, unless people are told the truth, gospel preachers are simply transferring prisoners from one prison yard to another. It implies that prisoners are moved from prisons such as beer parlor, discotheque, brothels, and so on, and moved to another prison yard called “church”. But, they are still in prison.

The Lord makes it clear, “only the truth sets free”. The truth is: man is a sinner needing forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Matt. 1: 21; John 8: 34-36; 1Jn. 3: 8. Man is neither a poor man needing millions nor a barren woman needing a child. He is a sinner needing forgiveness and deliverance from sin. He can only keep his salvation so long as he stays away from sin.

The first step in producing a Spirit-filled Christian is to pay attention to the conversion message. If a new convert received the wrong seed at the point of salvation, his fruit will not be compatible with the true nature of God. Only those born of the seed of the Spirit can manifest the fruit of the Spirit. (*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. John 3:6*)

What is the seed of the Spirit?

It is the message that both Jesus and John used to start ministry: **repent**. (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17) The message of repentance runs throughout the New Testament.

In listing the six elementary doctrines of Christianity in Heb. 6: 1-2, the first doctrine mentioned by the Holy Ghost is “repentance from dead works”. The primary foundation for a successful and fruitful Christian life is repentance. (The six doctrines are exhaustively treated in the book RETURN TO THE NARROW PATH). Anyone whose repentance is not genuine will continue live in sin and continually manifest the deeds of the old man.

When the Gentiles received the gospel for the first time in the house of Cornelius, how did the brethren in Jerusalem describe the conversion experience of the Gentiles? Acts 11:18 ... *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.* What gives life is repentance.

What message did the Lord give the disciples to go and preach? Mark 6:12 *And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*

How did the Lord describe His assignment? Luke 5:32 *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

What does it mean to repent? The English word repent is a combination of two Latin words – “re” and “pent”. “Re” means “again”; while “pent” means “think”. To repent simply means, “think again”. The first call to the sinner is: change the way that you think. The way the world thinks is totally different from the way that God thinks. Jesus showed us and taught us clearly the way God thinks. One cannot claim to belong to Christ and yet continue to think like the

world.

For one, the standard of value in the world is different from that of the kingdom of God. In the world, money is what gives you value, not your character. In the kingdom of God, obedience is what gives you value, not your money. (They that do the will of God shall abide for ever.) As a matter of fact, from the account of the rich young ruler, before you can be relevant in the kingdom of God, you are commanded to do away with money and earthly wealth so that you can qualify to follow Jesus. (Mark 10: 17-25). Zacchaeus in Luke 19: 8-9 readily parted with his wealth, and the Lord said, today, “... *salvation is come into this house*”. The rich young ruler refused to part with his, and the Lord said, “... *how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God*”.

*Mk. 4: 14 – The sower soweth the word.* The Word of God is the seed, nothing else. It is the seed that produces the tree which in turn bears the fruit. A lot of responsibility lies on the preachers of the gospel to faithfully preach the undiluted Word of God if we are to see the fruit of the Spirit manifest in the church.

It is only when the right seed is sown that the right fruit can manifest. To manifest the fruit of the Spirit, the seed of the Spirit must be sown. You cannot sow the seed of the flesh, and hope to reap the fruit of the Spirit. We should not forget that it is called “the fruit of the Spirit” and not “the fruit of the believer”. It is produced by the Holy Ghost in those people in whom He dwells, right from conversion; not those who started with carnal self centeredness and half way into the journey wish to switch over to the Holy Ghost. Psalm 11:3 *If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?* For many people in the church, they need to re-check their foundations and ensure it is deeply rooted in Christ. Or else, they should start afresh.

Packing congregations with people “saved” with messages of deliverance, prosperity, healing, promotion, and so on, is sowing seeds different from the seed of the Holy Ghost. The people grow in the church and find it difficult to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, but they find it quite natural and easy to manifest the works

of the flesh.

All over the world, believers are looking for Christians who manifest the fruit of the Spirit, but they are scarce. Many ministers and Christian workers are conducting themselves in questionable manners which query the integrity and credibility of the body of Christ.

#### EVEN THE RIGHT SEED FAILS

However, sowing the right seed is no guarantee that the right fruit will be produced, because the heart of man, which is the soil, can either accept the seed and make it fruitful, or choke it and kill it. The Lord makes this clear in the parable of the sower.

A great mystery lies in the parable of the sower. It is incredible that in providing the interpretation of the parable, the Lord pointed out that He is the Sower. How is it that God, the Perfect and Holy God, whom the scriptures describe as “wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom”, invested in an enterprise and 75% of His investment failed? This investment was done with the right seed, not the spurious seed of many modern day preachers.

The seed sown by God fell into four categories:

Those by the wayside	25%
Those on the rock	25%
Those amongst thorns	25%
Those on good soil	25%

75% of the seed sown by God perished. That is frightening. 1 Peter 4:18 *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* If 75% of those who received the correct seed of the Word of God perished, then what would happen to the multitudes that came to church based on spurious and carnal gospel messages?

One has heard ministers of the gospel say something like, “let them come in first before you begin to disciple them”. So, rather than tell the people the plain gospel truth, they feed them with spurious gospel messages and the people come to church having the wrong expectation. Excuse me, how can someone sow the seed of lime and proceed to tend the tree carefully hoping to reap oranges at harvest time? John 3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* What you sow is what you reap. You sow false message, you reap false Christianity. Even the correct seed lost 75% of what was sown; talk less of those who started with the wrong seed!

A lot of mysteries are encoded in the parables of the Lord. The Lord helped us greatly by letting us know that understanding the parable of the sower is the key that unlocks all the other parables. Whoever does not understand the parable of the sower cannot understand any other parable of Jesus Christ. The Lord chided the disciples when they asked for the interpretation of the parable of the sower thus, *And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?* Mark 4:13. In this parable of the sower is the principle of interpretations of all the other parables. It must be correctly understood.

To add to the mystery, those seeds that fell on good soil bore fruit in two different ways: ascending result and descending result.

In Matthew 13: 23, the scriptures revealed one category of believers who are decreasing in their walk and work with the Lord. They started by bearing fruit hundredfold, and then dropped to sixty, and finally thirty.

*Matthew 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

Mark 4: 20 showed the other group of the seeds on good soil which increase in fruit bearing from thirtyfold to sixty and on to hundred.

*Mark 4: 20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word,*



*and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*

The implication of all these is that no effort must be spared in sowing the right seed. There is no point in accepting the mandate to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ only to end up messing it. Even after doing it right, there is still no guarantee of 100% success because the seed still has to contend with the unpredictable heart of man. Subsequently, there comes the challenge of making the seeds bear fruit in ascending order and not a gradual falling away from the Lord.

This then, is the main problem why the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in the church as it ought. The problems are twofold:

1. The right seed is not sown in most believers at the point of salvation, so those who are in this category find it difficult to produce the right fruit.
2. Even in instances in which the right seed is sown, the heart of man chokes 75% of seed sown.

It is a spiritual principle that seed will produce after its kind. The normal thing is that the Word of God should produce children that are like God. Unfortunately, in reality, it has not turned out that way. The Greek word translated fruit is *karpos*, and it describes the fruit of trees as well as the fruit of one's body, for example, offspring. Hence, the fruit of the Spirit should be the natural behavior of every child of God. Manifesting the fruit of the Spirit must be natural to every one claiming to be born-again.

For the heaven bound children of God, there is no other alternative to manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. It is either the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh. There exists no neutral ground. Without the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, salvation is ship wrecked.

## LOVE

The first flavour of the fruit of the Spirit is love. What is love? Is it to be endeared to someone, feel much affection for someone, or one cannot bear to be absent from the loved one? Hollywood has defined love for this generation in a carnal and sensuous manner and that is the picture most people have of love.

While it would not be far fetched to claim that hatred is the opposite of love, it would appear that hatred is not the perfect opposite of love. We can fully understand love when we place it side by side with its natural opposite, which is lust. Lust means “to satisfy yourself at the expense of another person.” A husband can lust after his wife, and vice versa. A congregation can lust after the pastor, and a pastor can lust after the congregation. The children of Israel lusted after God in the Old Testament accounts, with terrible repercussions.

Love on the other hand means “to satisfy another person at your own expense.” When parents deny themselves sleep and work tirelessly to give their children a good education, it is because they love their children. God loved us so much that he satisfied us at His own expense by sacrificing His only Son to save His enemies. If believers have the proper understanding of the word “love” and put it into practise in the church as well as in the world, the fragrance of Christ would be everywhere. Unfortunately, rather than export love into the world, the church is importing lust from the world.

About sixteen different Greek words are translated love in the New Testament. We shall however focus on four primary words translated love in the Greek language: *eros*, *stergo*, *phileo*, and *agape*.[\[17\]](#)

### *Eros*

*Eros* denotes sexual love, from which “erotic” is derived. It has common root with “*erao*” which means to ask, to beg, to demand. Eros is not a love that gives,

or seeks to please others. On the contrary, it demands self satisfaction. It can best be described as raw and carnal love. According to Rick Renner, it is not once mentioned in the New Testament.

#### *Stergo:*

The next type of love is *stergo*. This describes love between parents and children, or members of family. The central idea in this kind of love is devotion.

In the end times however, this kind of love is going to be threatened. 2 Tim. 3: 3. “Without natural affection” is a derivative of *stergo* which indicates people shall be “hard hearted” to those they ought to be devoted to in love.

#### *Phileo:*

Phileo describes people who are comfortable with each other, or are well matched. It describes friends. This is the attribute of friendship.

In John 21: 15-17, the Lord asked Peter if he loved Him. In the first two instances, the Lord used the word “agapao” and Peter replied with “phileo”. It was like the Lord was asking, “Peter do you love me?” Peter replied, “Yes Lord, I like you.” On the third occasion, the Lord used the word “phileo”. “Peter, do you like me?” At that point, Peter broke down. The scripture said he was “grieved”.

Of all the apostles, Peter boasted the most about his love for Jesus. Yet, next to Judas, he debased the Lord the most. When his “love” was tested, it turned out to be friendship and not real love.

Peter served as a reflection of most of us. We claim to love the Lord, but in truth, we only like Him. We shy away from making sacrifices for Him the way He did for us. We are reluctant to leave our comfort zone or to be inconvenienced for His sake. Many of us use the word “love” glibly, not realizing that what we

actually mean is “like”. When the going is good, for most Christians “the Lord is good”. When the difficulties come or we have to suffer for the sake of the Lord, the shout of Hallelujah drops many decibels; if it is heard at all.

“Phileo” is not the kind of love that is a flavor of the fruit of the Spirit. The God kind of love is “agape”.

### *Agape*

Satisfying others at your own expense.

This is the high level love that God demonstrated in John 3: 16. This is the love the Lord referred to in John 15:13 *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*. This is love that knows no limit and will go as far as sacrificing itself for the sake of the person loved.

Agape is a self sacrificial love that moves the lover to action. It loves without any string attached and it is not looking for what it can receive; only what it can give.

The scriptures urge Christians to possess this kind of love and demonstrate it one to another. 1 John 3:16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*. If Christians heed the admonition of the Lord to love like this, there would be no envy or negative competition in the church.

It is possible to love like this, if the seed of the word of God is sown inside a man. Without the seed of the word of God, such love demanded by God is impossible. With the indwelling Presence of the Holy Ghost, this kind of love is possible.

The crucial role the seed of the word of God plays in producing “agape” love further underscores the need to ensure that people are converted based on the message of the cross, and not messages of earthly indulgence. The God kind of love is lacking in the church today because the seed sown at salvation for most people is not the right seed.

## JOY

The joy referred to as a fruit of the Spirit is different from happiness which is dependent on outward circumstances. Joy is not affected by the environment neither is it determined by circumstances. On the contrary, it thrives best in difficult and tough situations.

It is regarded as God's supernatural response to the attacks of the devil on the children of God. The fruit of joy is a Holy Ghost endowed exuberance that is released when the going gets tough, difficult and strenuous.[\[18\]](#)

According to Dake, the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23; Eph. 5:9; James 3:17, 18) are those gracious dispositions and habits which the Spirit produces in those in whom he dwells and works. Since joy is a fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in those whom He indwells, it is therefore difficult, if not outright impossible, for those not born of the Spirit to manifest joy in the midst of afflictions and adversities.

The Lord makes it clear in John 3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* This scripture refers back to the earlier points that adequate attention must be paid to the salvation message presented to the new convert. The Word is the seed. If the right seed is not sown, then it becomes difficult for Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of joy because God is not going to build upon a foundation laid by the flesh. This may be the reason why many "Christians" find it difficult to handle crisis and persecutions according to scriptural standards.

The New Testament, in most instances, associated "joy" with "affliction", thereby pointing to a fact that the fruit of joy is released whenever affliction comes. Joy is not produced by the believer; it is produced by the Holy Spirit inside the believer in whom He dwells. This fact runs contrary to the shallow and artificial noise-making prevalent in most Christian assemblies.

*1 Thes. 1:6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:*

*1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:*

*James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

The word “affliction” in the Greek comes from “thlipsis”, which refers to a heavy pressure situation. It draws on the imagery of a cruel punishment in which the victim is laid on the ground and heavy objects are piled on him to crush him.

When believers experience this crushing pressure that normally should have produced sorrow and despondency, Holy Spirit releases the fruit of joy. It has often elicited bewildered reaction from unbelievers to observe Christians going through so many problems and yet joyfully singing praises and rejoicing. It is unearthly; such rejoicing in the midst of adversity could only come from heaven.

This is the fruit that was manifested in Paul and Silas in Acts 16: 22-25. It is encouraging to read of the account of Paul and Silas singing and praising God after they had been flogged, cast into the prison, and in the prison they were fastened to the stock. How many Christians would be joyful in such a situation? Most modern day Christians would already be querying God or commanding that all their enemies should fall down and die!

The fruit of joy encourages believers to overlook offenses and laugh at opposition. When believers manifest the tendency of the world to rise and fight for their rights, it is because they find nothing joyful about the situation they are in.

To be joyful under afflictions requires grace. The Greek word for joy is “chara” which is derived from “charis” the Greek word for grace. The implication is that joy comes by grace. It requires grace to rejoice in the midst of afflictions and heavy pressures.

The fruit of joy is totally unlike human happiness which varies with situations

and circumstances. The most that the world can offer is temporary happiness and it is dependent upon favorable conditions. On the contrary, when the going gets tough, the child of God starts smiling because the life of God within him rises with joy to defy the satanic pressure.

This is the reason that the scriptures can say, “*the joy of the Lord is your strength*” *Neh. 8: 10*. The “joy” does not belong to the believer, it is owned by God and it reflects God laughing at Satan as the devil seeks to oppress someone seated on the right hand of God in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When the going gets tough, God imparts His joy to the believer and causes the believer to see the situation the way that God Himself sees it. People can pretend to have it when the going is good, but there is no faking it when crisis lands.

## PEACE

Dake described peace as the state of quietness, rest, repose, harmony, order, and security in the midst of turmoil, strife, and temptations. Peace does not denote the absence of strife or discord. The fruit of peace denotes tranquillity in the midst of chaos.

The Greek word “eirene” expresses the idea of wholeness, completeness, or tranquillity on the soul that is unaffected by outward circumstances. The fruit of peace enables a believer to conduct himself peacefully, even in the midst of circumstances that would normally be very nerve-racking, traumatic or upsetting.

A very good example is found in Acts 27. It is instructive to note that 276 people were on board the ship that was tossed to and fro for days, yet only one man remained peaceful in such a situation. All the hard soldiers, rough sailors, tough prisoners, including the entrepreneur on board, none of them could handle the situation with calmness and fortitude. It is certain that if those people had been instructed to fast for seven days, they would have defaulted. Yet, in the midst of the storm, they fasted 14 days without food. They lost appetite; they “lost their

cool”. Paul had to beg them to break the fast and eat.

What gave Paul so much confidence and calmness in such a stressful situation? Paul heard directly from God. God imparted his word to Paul and the word singled him out for calmness. Rather than being broken by the situation, Paul became the channel of orderliness and confidence in such a situation.

This is the calm confidence that God expects of His children when they face crisis. Jesus had earlier warned, “in this world ye shall have tribulation”. So, every child of God should merely wait for “when” trouble will come, not “if” it would come.

*John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

Going through the New Testament, it is clear that the Lord promised His followers that they would be in trouble constantly. There are more indications in the New Testament that Christians would be hated in the world and subjected to various ill-treatments rather than being loved and accepted. To enable believers handle the stress, God gives the fruit of peace to His children.

As noted earlier that the fruit is of the Holy Spirit, and it is imparted to those whom He birthed, so it is with peace. The Lord referred to it as “my peace I give unto you”. It is not our peace, it is His peace. We are merely called to share in the virtue of Prince of Peace. The only way that virtue can be demonstrated is if there is first and foremost turmoil and problem. If every situation around a person is calm and serene, there is no need for the fruit of peace. However, since the Lord predicted trouble, tribulation, fiery trials, killings, persecution, and so on, for His followers, then the fruit of peace is indispensable for the true follower of Christ.

Peace does not imply that you will be living in a serene atmosphere. It simply means that everything around you will be greatly disturbed and in the midst of the chaos around you, you will remain calm and unperturbed.



The fruit of peace is produced by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be produced by the flesh as the flesh loves to fret, rave, and blow issues out of proportion. Christians should avoid giving way to upsetting emotions or difficult situations. Rather, they should allow Holy Spirit to work in them to produce peace in periods of stress and difficulties. Every contrary situation should be seen as an opportunity to manifest the peace of God. *And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Romans 16:20*

## LONG SUFFERING

To suffer long is derived from the Greek word *makrothumia*, which is a compound of *makros* and *thumos*. “Makros” indicates something long, distant, far, remote, or of long duration. “Thumos” on the other hand, refers to anger, or swelling emotion, or growing passion about something.[\[19\]](#)

When the two words are combined, they mean “patient restraint of anger”. It can further be referred to as patience or forbearance. Long suffering indicates the ability to postpone anger and overlooking offenses repeatedly to avoid yielding to the negative emotion of anger.

For this virtue to be demonstrated there must be a conscious effort to manifest it. Long suffering does not come automatically, it must be consciously exercised.

Col. 3:12 *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;* The Greek word for “put on” is “enduo”, which refers to putting on of garment. The implication is that as one has to decide on what to wear, in like manner, one has to decide to either exercise long suffering or not.

The Lord never said that Christians will neither be offended nor provoked, but our reaction cannot be determined by the offender. If we are to walk in long suffering, we have to make a decision to do so. It requires a conscious decision to suffer long, not to get easily provoked.

Long suffering is the opposite of the flesh which quickly gets offended and explodes in fury, at times saying things that it later regrets. God expects us not to be short tempered, but gentle and long suffering.

However, exercising long suffering does not mean that Christians should tolerate every evil and misconduct around them. If these were so, then there would be no room for discipline and correction in our lives.

A good example is found in Acts 16: 16-18. The damsel possessed with the spirit of divination followed the group of Paul for many days before Paul became exasperated and he dealt with the evil spirit. There should, therefore, be Godly balance in exercising long suffering to avoid Christians tolerating every junk that the devil and the flesh can rake up to defile their surroundings.

## GENTLENESS

Greek: *chrestotes* is a disposition to be gentle, soft spoken, kind, even-tempered, cultured, and refined in character and conduct.[\[20\]](#)

*Chrestotes* often depicted rulers, governors, or people who were kind, mild and benevolent to their subjects. It means to show kindness or to be friendly to others. Anyone who manifested these qualities is considered to be compassionate, considerate, sympathetic, humane, kind or gentle.[\[21\]](#)

When the fruit of gentleness is produced in a believer by the Holy Spirit, the individual develops the ability to adapt to the needs of others. The fellow would be considerate and seek to please and understand others rather than seek to be pleased. Rather than expect people to conform to one's own standard and rules, a gentle person would rather change and adapt for the benefit of other people. Even if he is more highly placed than the people around him, he would deliberately bring himself low to the level of the people and adapt himself to their condition.

This is exactly what Jesus did in taking the nature of man in order to save man. Rather than sit in heaven and demand that man should change into the image of God, the Lord came down first in the likeness of man in order to lead us into the image of God.

Philip. 2:7-8 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: [8] And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

The flesh on the other hand would start throwing its weight around and demand that things be done its own way. Those who manifest this aggressive attitude in fellowships end up irritating others and repelling them from fellowshiping with the people of God.

## GOODNESS

The word goodness is used to portray someone *who is generous, big-hearted, liberal, and charitable with his finances*. This type of person is referred to as a “giver”.

Goodness is derived from the Greek word “agathusune” which comes from the Greek “agathos” which means to be good. When *agathos* becomes *agathusune*, it means goodness in the sense of being good to someone.

This characteristic was used of the Lord in Acts 10: 38 where the scripture record that He went about “doing good”. In the Greek, the word *euergeteo* denotes a benefactor, philanthropist, or one who financially supports charitable works. It is usually used for someone with wealth who uses it to assist others.

The fruit of the Spirit called “goodness” is the supernatural urge in a person to reach out to meet the needs in the lives of others. The Lord did not only perform mighty miracles, He also used the resources of His ministry to meet the needs of people. A case in point is the account in John 12:5 “*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?*” The statement is an indication that the people are used to seeing the Lord give to the poor. Another verse which

supports the giving habit in the ministry of the Lord is John 13: 29:

*For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.*

Giving to the poor was an integral part of the ministry of the Lord and God wants believers to emulate that virtue. In listing goodness as a fruit of the Spirit, God indicates that every child of God that is materially and financially endowed by heaven should reach beyond himself to help other people.

When believers are in tune with the Spirit of God, their eyes would be opened to see needs in the lives of other people. Unfortunately, many believers seem to lack this virtue. Not only believers seem to lack this virtue, but local assemblies and denominations are also in need of revival in the area of giving to help the poor and the needy.

One noticeable area of need is the provision of quality education. Many families cannot afford to send their children to private schools as the standard in public schools keep falling. Some families cannot even afford the meager cost of sending a child to the public school. All around one sees under aged children hawking insignificant items during the day, when they should be in school, while some children are attached as apprentices to artisans. One would have expected that the churches would respond with educational grants and scholarships for the less privileged in the society.

True, the churches responded by setting up schools. However, the fee they charge is among the highest in the community. Even the low income members of the church who contributed in tithes and offerings to set up the schools could not afford to send their children to those schools.

If Christians truly believe that “give, it shall be given unto you”, why could not the present day churches set up free education schools? After all, the early missionaries did so in Africa and most of the ministers of the gospel today

attended free education schools. It is unbelievable that even the full time pastors in certain denominations cannot afford to send their children to the schools of their denominations!

Ministries that have commercialized the church as well as the arms of the ministry lack the fruit of goodness. Truly money is needed to run the schools and maintain a good standard, but are these not the same set of people who teach “my God shall supply all of your needs”? If the ministers of the gospel truly believe that “give it shall be given unto you”, there is no reason why churches should not offer free education and free health services. After all, at every worship service, they still collect tithes and offerings. Are churches only meant to receive and not give back?

Since churches are not manifesting goodness, the individual members of the church remain stingy and uncaring about the plight the less privileged in the church and in the society face. The Lord made it clear, *Mark 14:7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always*. Why would God leave some people poor? He expects those that are rich amongst His children to demonstrate His nature by loving and taking care of them. Rather than take care of the poor, most of the rich people in the church scorn them and create invisible barriers between the “haves” and the “have nots”.

The amount of money some Christians spend on personal earthly indulgence in one week can last a family for one year. Some send their children to outrageously expensive and snobbish schools while ignoring members of their families struggling to educate theirs in public schools.

The pattern which the church was meant to follow was laid in Acts 2:44-45 *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; [45] And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

Rather than build upon this foundation of love and brotherly kindness, churches in this age encourage individualism by encouraging people to “maximize your

potential”. So, the church ceases to function as a body, which God has designed it to be, while the members of the church join the rat race of the world. The unfortunate thing about joining the rat race is that even if you come first, you still remain a rat.

Even if it is not possible to put all things in a common bag, there is nothing stopping the people from being taught constantly about generosity and moderate lifestyle so that the excess they have can be used to help the poor and the needy. There is nothing stopping churches from encouraging the rich in their midst to give scholarship to children from needy homes or setting up educational and welfare foundation to help the needy.

In the book BEWARE OF SUCCESS, the author pointed out that the wealth of some Christians is what would damn them and hinder them from making heaven. God gave clear instructions to the rich believer that is desirous of making heaven. It is clear, it is unequivocal – you must be a giver, or else ...!

1 Tim. 6:17-19 *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; [18] That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; [19] Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

When believers are in the Spirit, their eyes are supernaturally opened to see the needs in the lives of other people. Holy Spirit is then able to move them to respond to those needs.

## FAITH

There is a difference between faith as a gift of the Spirit and faith as fruit of the Spirit. The Greek word *pistis* is the common New Testament word for faith. Faith is the persuasion that God is Who He says He is and He will do whatsoever He has said. Its primary idea is trust. As a gift of the Spirit, it represents the channel

to connect with the supernatural power of God. It is the key that unlocks the door of grace into the hall of salvation. It is also the vehicle that transports answers to prayers from the spirit realm to the physical.

As a fruit of the Spirit, it conveys the idea of someone who is faithful, reliable, loyal and steadfast. It can be summarized as the virtue to be faithful.

It is a virtue that pictures someone who is devoted, trustworthy, dependable, dedicated, constant, and unwavering. In a world that is filled with treachery, betrayal, backbiting, God wants His children to mirror His image of truth and steadfastness. The virtue of faith is totally opposite that of the flesh which seeks to be lazy, treacherous, uncommitted, undependable and completely unreliable.

We can surmise that faith as a gift of the Spirit is man exercising trust in God that God is Who He says that He is, and He will do whatsoever He has promised. From the perspective of man, it conveys the idea that God is trustworthy, reliable and dependable.

On the other hand, faith as fruit of the Spirit pictures God exercising faith (trust) in man that man is faithful, dependable, reliable and trustworthy. In essence, faith as a gift of the Spirit is helping man to trust God while faith as a fruit of the Spirit enables God to trust man. Since there can be no relationship without trust, it is not enough for believers to exercise faith in God for their needs as well as for divine interventions, it is equally crucial that God should be able to trust us as individuals that He can rely upon to fulfil His purpose.

Therefore, Holy Spirit undertakes a twofold task in man, as concerns faith.

- Works in man so that man can trust God – gift of the Spirit.
- Works in man so that God and people can trust the believer – fruit of the Spirit.

It is not enough that you have matured to the point of knowing how to exercise faith in God. You must equally position your life as an individual whom God can trust. If you alone can trust God, yet God can neither trust you nor rely on

you, you have no relationship with Him. As mentioned earlier, there can be no relationship without trust.

God esteems faithfulness very highly. God Himself is faithful and dependable and He expects such virtue from His children. Christians should be the most dependable people in the world. People should not entertain any apprehension about working or doing business with Christians or entrusting sensitive information or projects into their hands. Unfortunately, this is seldom so as many of those that profess Christianity exhibit the same obnoxious characteristics of unreliability as found in unbelievers. Unfortunately, these character flaws in professing Christians have served to create credibility crisis for the church.

The moral standard for the believers is the character of God. Any behaviour that is less than the character of God falls short of His expectation and acceptance. He may tolerate it, but He does not accept it. He commands in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, “Be ye holy, for I the LORD thy God I am holy”. Lev. 11: 44; 1 Pet. 1: 16

The manifestation of faith must be twofold: faith of man towards God and faith of God towards man. In every situation that a child of God finds himself, he must constantly demonstrate faithfulness and dependability. It is a powerful witness for the kingdom of God.

As ungodly as the world system is, unbelievers are seeking honest people. What a powerful testimony it would be for the Lord if every believer one encounters is faithful and dependable!

*1 Cor. 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

## MEEKNESS

Whenever we hear of the word meek, we are tempted to think of an individual that is weak or timid. It usually connotes someone defenceless like a lamb or someone unable to take a stand for himself. On the contrary, meekness is a



strong attribute.

It is derived from the Greek *praotes* which describes the attitude of someone who is forbearing, patient, and slow to respond in anger; one who remains in control of himself in the face of insults and injuries.[\[22\]](#)

Dake describes it as the disposition *to be gentle, kind, indulgent, even balanced in tempers and passions, and patient in suffering injuries without feeling a spirit of revenge.*

In Greek, *praotes* actually conveys the idea of a noble character and an ideal state one should aspire to in life. It pictures someone, who under intense provocation, is guided by kindness, gentleness, mildness or even friendliness. This is the nature that Jesus demonstrated in the garden of Gethsemane on the night that Judas betrayed Him.

Matthew 26:50 *And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.*

It is touching that the Lord still called Judas “friend” even though, He knew what he had done. It is not surprising for the Spirit of prophecy has foretold that *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.* Isaiah 53:7 The Lord demonstrated meekness, giving us an example to follow.

Meekness is not weakness; meekness is manifestation of strength in the inner man. The meek individual is not weak, he is “controlled”. He may be a powerful person or someone influential in the society, yet under intense provocation, he is mild mannered. Such a one has learnt the secret of submission.

Whenever the Spirit of God is producing meekness in the life of an individual, such a person is controlled even in difficult situations. Rather than fly into a fit of fury, he is able to keep his emotions and temper under control. This nature is opposite the nature of the flesh which at the slightest provocation rages out of control.

Whenever Christians rage and exhibit aggressive behaviours, they simply manifest their lack of meekness, the fruit of the Spirit, and demonstrate the work of the flesh identified earlier – wrath.

Not only is the meek person controlled, his expression does not portray anger or fury. Rather, he is so mild and gentle that his reaction to the situation is like a soothing balm.

Every believer needs to appraise how he or she handles offences. If you find yourself flying into a rage at the slightest provocation or inconvenience, it simply implies that the Spirit of God is not working in you to produce the meek nature of Christ. Every child of God is meant to produce the fruit of the Spirit and meekness is a key fruit in a world that is filled with violence and assault. Every believer should be able to say like Paul, *But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:* 1 Thes. 2:7

## TEMPERANCE

Closely linked with meekness is the virtue of temperance. Both words are so closely linked that there is a thin dividing line between them. While meekness has to do with the attitude of a person who can control his temper or emotions, temperance means to be in control over the self.

Temperance is a combination of two Greek words, *en* and *kratos*. The word *en* means “in” and the word *kratos* mean “power”. When compounded, the two words means *enkrateia*, which means to be in control and power over one’s self.[\[23\]](#)

Some Bible translations render it “self control”. It suggests power or restraint over appetites, desires, passions, and emotions. This is clearly opposite the flesh which has no control and always indulges in excess. As pointed out by Renner, the flesh will over-worry, over-eat, over-work, indulge in every form of vice and run itself to death. The flesh has no control.

A temperate person is moderate and knows when to say “no” and “it is enough”. Moderation is one key virtue that believers are meant to manifest in every sphere of life. It marks believers apart from unbelievers who have a tendency to over-do everything.

Christians are meant to have control over appetites, physical urges, passions, and desires. A life without self control is a life out of control. Whenever people manifest a lifestyle that is devoid of self control, it is a signal that Holy Spirit is not in-dwelling such individual. The fellow could be a “believer”, and he could even claim and be recognized as a minister of the gospel, once he cannot exercise self control, Holy Spirit is not in Him.

Due to the in-dwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit, a believer should be able to say “no” to earthly indulgence and the excesses of the flesh. The Spirit of grace that saved us demands soberness and moderation from us. Titus 2:11-12 *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, [12] Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

Believers who find it difficult to exercise moderation in certain areas of their lives need to re-check their personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. Soberness and moderation are two key virtues easily noticed in anyone under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Christians must exercise moderation and self control in eating, talking, dressing, spending, in seeking entertainment and fun, and so on. Like the scriptures admonish, *And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away* 1 Cor. 7:31. Those who heed the admonition of the Word of God to be moderate will live a balanced life free from sin, sickness, and offences.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRIST**

*In the spiritual life, only one thing produces genuine joy and that is obedience. –*

*Richard Foster*

Closely linked with following the Holy Spirit is obedience. There can be no relationship with the Holy Spirit without a heart of obedience. Many of the heroes of faith whose stories we read in the Bible became famous with God because of their obedience, nothing else. They were obedient, and God did the rest.

There are two principles operating in the universe. These are:

- The principle of obedience
- The principle of rebellion

The principle of obedience is symbolized by Jesus Christ Who became obedient to death while the principle of rebellion is symbolized by Lucifer the devil. At any particular moment, everyone is operating under one of these two principles. We are either operating under the principle of Christ or we are operating under the principle of the devil. There is no middle ground, neither is there neutrality.

The unfortunate thing for many of God's children is that in doctrine they follow Jesus Christ, while in principle they follow the devil. According to Watchman Nee, God is not interested in our doctrine; He is interested in our principle. It is the principle we live by that truly reveals our character. [\[24\]](#)

There are many professors of Christianity whose doctrines are perfect. They are grounded in sound doctrine, but in principle, they are self-willed and stubborn. The truth they know is unable to help them manifest the character of Christ. It is one thing to know the truth; it is another question entirely whether one lives according to the truth that he knows.

The forces of darkness laugh when they see a disobedient and rebellious person teaching or preaching. The devil recognizes himself as a rebel and he knows that whoever manifests his character is not acceptable in the Presence of God. For the fiend, it is double laughter for him; at the person claiming to be serving God, and unfortunately, he is also mocking heaven that the children of the devil are posing as servants of God.

Unknown to many believers, the forces of darkness are not afraid of the prayers and fasting of Christians. In both, there could be self-will and self-promotion. The only thing that the devil and his hosts are afraid of is the obedience of the believer. Whenever a believer manifests perfect obedience to God, the forces of hell are threatened. Such a person is marked as a dangerous enemy. A number of reasons are responsible for this fear:

- The obedient Christian reminds the forces of darkness of the strategy of Christ leading to His victory over hell.
- There is no limit to which God can use an obedient person. Whenever God identifies a perfect vessel to use, usually such a one is used to destroy the works of the devil and limit his progress.
- The obedient Christian has perfect and effective authority over the devil and the forces of darkness.

A lot of the warfare prayers of most believers do not scratch the devil, let less of injuring him, because authority exercised by a rebellious person cannot have any impact on hell. How can the pot be calling the kettle black? How many children of God obey God? How many believers submit to God's appointed authority

over them? Disobedience is disobedience in the Presence of God, whether it is manifested by man or by an evil spirit. The authority of believers over the forces of darkness is only effective if the believers themselves are under authority.

*2 Cor. 10:6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*

The story was told of the sister who was into deliverance ministry. Once in a while, she would behave like a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberated woman at home and challenge the authority of her husband. Over a period of time, she discovered that whenever she challenged her husband at home, no evil spirit would submit to her during her ministrations. She later got to identify the link between the difficulties in her ministrations with her attitude towards her husband. In the process of time she learnt that if she did not submit to her husband, she was in no position to exercise spiritual authority. So, before she proceeded on any ministration, she would first go and meet her husband and find out if she had offended him in any way. Once she settles every act of disrespect with her husband, demons became submissive when she ministers.

A Christian living under the principle of the devil cannot exercise any authority over any devil. It has to take someone living under the principle of Christ who can make evil spirits submit.

It should be pointed out that many believers are sensitive to sin but they are not sensitive to rebellion and disobedience. A lot of Christians are carefully avoiding adultery, stealing, lying, as well as murder, but they are insensitive to stubbornness, disobedience, self-will, rebellion and insubordination. Oftentimes, people excuse insubordination as “fighting for one’s rights”. Many believers are yet to learn the secret of allowing God to fight for their right.

## WHO SHOULD BE OBEYED?

There is only one authority in the universe and that is the Almighty God. Apart

from God, no one has authority in the universe. On planet earth God exercises His authority directly and indirectly.

- Directly when He speaks or commands by His Spirit.
- Indirectly through delegated human authority. Romans 13:1-2 *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. [2] Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

No human being is authority or has authority. The kings, presidents, premiers, generals, pastors, bishops, teachers, police, army and so on, are all delegated authorities. Every one wielding authority on earth has no authority, he merely represents authority. There is no authority but God. One day, all those representing authority on the earth shall render account what they did with God's authority.

Whosoever disobeys authority at whatever level disobeys God. Every child of God should learn to seek first and foremost in every situation who is representing God and submit to that authority. The person representing God in a situation may not even be a Christian, but his authority must be obeyed. For example, a traffic warden on the road is an example of delegated authority. Whether he is an unbeliever or an atheist, he must be obeyed.

Believers need to develop the habit of submitting to one another as the Bible teaches. 1 Peter 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* The elders and the leaders in the church need to recognize the authority of those under them. God did not concentrate His authority in one individual or in one group of individuals. If we do not recognize the sphere of influence of those considered beneath us, we fall into the sin of rebellion against God's authority.

For example, assume a pastor arrived in church on Sunday morning and as he

sought to park his car, a brother controlling vehicles in the church premises requested that the pastor should park in a particular place which the pastor did not favor. Of course, the brother was considering the overall parking arrangement for the entire church, but the “man of God” was in no mood to receive instruction from a car park attendant. Assume the pastor disregarded the brother and insisted on parking where it was convenient for him, and then he went into the church building and preached a wonderful sermon - who did the pastor represent during the worship service?

- The “man of God” displayed the principle of Lucifer,
- He ignored the word of God that admonished believers to “submit one to another and be clothed with humility”,
- He disobeyed a delegated authority.

That lowly brother was representing God in the car park. Whoever disobeys him disobeys God. All through that worship service, demons would be laughing their heads off because a representative of the character of hell was posing as a vessel of God.

At every level, believers must always seek to ascertain, who has authority here? Who is the delegated authority, now? Once the delegated authority is recognized, every heaven bound child of God must submit to him or her. The pastor has his authority, the usher has his authority, and so does the choir member, and so on. Every Christian worker has his own sphere of influence. God did not concentrate all His authority in one person; He delegated it to His people.

Looking through the scriptures, it could be seen that sin is more easily forgiven by God than rebellion. The reason could be that sin has to do with conduct (2 Sam. 12: 13) while rebellion has to do with principle (1 Sam.15: 22-24). Why did God forgive David and yet Saul did not receive forgiveness? David committed sin while Saul rebelled against the authority of God.

For obedience to work, there must be subjection. Ephes. 5:21 *Submitting*



*yourselves one to another in the fear of God.* If there is no subjection, there can be no obedience. If an individual conducts himself in a manner that suggests that he is better than other people or higher than them, then, such an individual will be self-willed and rebellious. In view of this, believers should not permit titles and positions in the church to deceive them about their true status in the sight of God. As far as God is concerned, “*all ye are brethren*”.

The story was told of a remarkable head of a denomination who visited one of the branches of the denomination. It was usual for that denomination to have workers meeting very early on Sunday morning before the main worship service commenced. It was also the norm that on the dot of the time, the door would be locked so that late comers would not participate in the workers meeting.

On this particular Sunday, the head of the denomination paid an unscheduled visit to this particular branch. He entered the premises at the dot of the time the workers meeting was supposed to commence and started walking towards the door. The Usher assigned to lock was already locking the door as the old man entered the premises. Despite having seen him afar off, the Usher did not wait the few seconds that it would take for the head of the denomination to reach the door. He locked it.

Like all the other late comers, the old man waited outside until the workers meeting ended. When the door opened and the resident pastor saw the senior pastor standing at the door, he nearly fainted.

“When did you arrive, Sir.”

“Just as the door was closing”, replied the old man.

On hearing that, the pastor turned furiously to face the Usher but the old man called the pastor to order immediately.

“Leave him alone. He did the correct thing. If he had waited for me before locking the door, I would have disciplined him. I was not supposed to be in the premises as of the time he was shutting the door, I was supposed to have been

inside.”

The old man recognized the authority of that young Usher and he submitted himself to it. We rarely see manifestation of such humility in the church anymore. Nowadays, “men of God” would wait for the worship service to commence before they would arrive. God commands mutual submission for the people of God to learn obedience.

## TWO CATEGORIES OF SIN

Every act of disobedience that man commits falls under one of these two categories:[\[25\]](#)

- Not doing what God says                      1 Sam. 15: 19-24
- Doing what God has not said.              2 Sam. 6: 6-7

The first is rebellion, while the second one is presumption. As pointed out earlier, the average believer is more sensitive to sin than to rebellion. Not many believers are aware that they are doing something wrong when they rebel because few people are conscious of rebellion and disobedience. It is a common trait in the world.

Even amongst the few who have a measure of awareness of rebellion, very few of them realize that presumption is as dangerous as rebellion. As can be seen in the case of Uzzah, it was instant death.

Defining rebellion is fairly easy; the life of King Saul was a scriptural definition of rebellion. Presumption on the other hand often disguises in ministry as initiative or adopting “winning patterns”. For example, when Pastor Yonggi Cho’s ministry gained worldwide attention and the strategy for the growth of his local assembly was identified as house fellowships, most ministries immediately embarked on starting house fellowships. That was presumption. Did God say they should start house fellowships?

A particular denomination actually sent its senior pastors to South Korea to study Pastor Cho's strategy with the intention of replicating it in Nigeria. They discovered that people would attend the house fellowship to partake of the generous refreshment but would not surface in church on Sunday. After months of presumptuous fellowship, the head of the denomination took time to seek the face of God and obtained clear directions for the ministry which was different from house fellowships. Now, the denomination is one of the largest in the world.

Presumption is having a strong reason for believing something to be so in spite of lack of proof or something believed but not proved.[\[26\]](#) Doing ministry or programs without a clear "thus saith the Lord" could be very risky for a servant of God. Presumption, like rebellion, is a principle of Lucifer. Is. 14: 12-14 record the presumptuous five "I will" of Satan. Did God say Satan should ascend to the heights of God or be like the Most High?

If God should tell a man "go" and the man did not go, that is rebellion. If God did not tell a man "go", and the man went, that is presumption. Both are acts of disobedience and self-will.

It is common to find ministries copying the successful patterns of other ministries. True, they may get results on the earth, but they may be losing points in heaven. It is only God Who knows what the individual pattern of a ministry is supposed to be. Nowadays, it is fashionable to have a large congregation and impressive cathedral as a mark of successful ministry. Suppose that is not the pattern of God for a particular ministry but the pastor adopted that model, what happens?

- That ministry would have left undone what God actually assigned for it to do.
- The ministry would have misappropriated the resources that God gave to it to pursue objectives that God did not give to it.

- The ministry would be operating with human knowledge and not the anointing of the Holy Spirit because God will only anoint what He has assigned. As Clarence Jones said, "When God's finger points, God's hand will open the door."
- The pastor and his team have no reward from God for all their labors.
- If they run into problems in the ministry, they should not depend on heaven for back-up, since they are acting independently of heaven.
- The real ministry of the pastor, which is actually his destiny, would be transferred to another person, since he is busy running his own show.
- Since the pastor is living by the principle of Lucifer, when he dies, he goes to meet him.

Presumption. If God did not send you, do not go. It is dangerous to be presumptuous. A matured believer lives by the principle of Christ. He seeks the will of God at all times and lives on "thy will be done".

There is a way out of presumption. Isaiah 40:31 *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Assume you go to a restaurant for lunch, as you take a seat someone materializes and silently stands by your side. His name is Waiter. His job is to wait on you to receive your order. The waiter is not going to say because the person seated on the table next to yours is eating spaghetti; automatically spaghetti is what you too desire. The waiter will engage you in a straight forward conversation to determine your specific need.

"What would you like to eat, please?"

If you reply rice, he would ask,

"Which type of rice?"

In the kitchen there is white rice, jollof rice, fried rice, and coconut rice. If, for example you chose fried rice, the waiter would prod further:

“Fish, meat, or chicken?”

After ascertaining your specific desire on the food, the same routine would commence for the drink. The waiter would not leave your side until he has fully ascertained all that you desire. Then, he would go to the kitchen and bring your specific order. When you have eaten, you will pay him.

In like manner, God demands that we should stand in His Presence like a waiter and obtain His specific instructions for our lives and ministries. Every ministry is different from the other and for each one, God has a specific instruction.

There is a pattern, an order, established in heaven for each life and more importantly for each ministry. Every minister of the gospel must do ministry following the due order established by God for him. There is no reason why ministries should copy the pattern of each other. In copying the pattern of other ministries, people abandon their own calling and start acting out the script written by God for another person. Not only is it presumptuous to do that, but all who engage in such practice labor in vain.

## THE SOURCE OF REBELLION

By tracing all authority back to its root we get to God. Rom. 13: 1-2. God is the source of every authority on the earth, every ruler and leader is delegated authority.

By tracing rebellion and presumption back to its root, we get to the devil. Rebellion is the root of “charismatic witchcraft” in the church. Going through the scriptures, it can be seen that rebellion is seldom the result of bad character trait. It is indicated as the result of satanic influence over those who are disobedient and rebellious.

## Ephes. 2:1-3

*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; [2] Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

The Word of God is clear that there is a spirit working in those who are disobedient and identified that spirit as the “prince of the power of the air”. Every human being was born into the influence of this spirit and it was the influence of this spirit that alienated us from God, since it works contrary to the Spirit of God. God in His mercy brought deliverance to man through Jesus Christ. The following points quickly come to mind in dealing with disobedience:

- Dealing with disobedience and rebellion involves spiritual warfare, since both are projected by an evil spirit.
- Those that are obedient today can become disobedient tomorrow if they yield ground to this evil spirit. Apparently, this is what happened to King Saul.
- Discipline has to be enforced on people, particularly children, to train them to resist the influence of this spirit.

The Old Testament provides ample illustrations to support the earlier point that rebellion is seldom the result of bad character trait but a demonic influence. It would be recalled that when the Israelites left Egypt to claim the Promised Land, Satan attached two demons to follow them. One was named Baal while the other was named Ashtoreth. Baal was responsible for idolatry while Ashtoreth was in charge of sexual immorality.

The people of God kept going back and forth in their relationship with God on these two sins. Each time God inflicted heavy punishment on them; the people would repent and turn to Jehovah. A few years later, they were back, bowing

before Baal and lusting at the Asherah grove. They had a particular wild party patterned after the heathen worship of Ashtoreth when Moses was on the mountain with God. In that particular incident, Baal manifested as the golden calf while Ashtoreth showed up in wild orgies.

These two demons stayed with the nation of Israel until God had no other option but to destroy the nation and send the people into captivity. The captivity cured the Israelites of every form of idolatry and sexual perversion. By the time the Lord Jesus arrived on the earth, Satan had seen clearly that nothing would make the people go into idolatry; the punishment of the captivity was so heavy it made the people resistant to every form of idolatry. So, the devil withdrew Baal and Ashtoreth and replaced them with another evil spirit.

Going through the New Testament, it could be seen that the Lord did not once contend with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, and the people concerning adultery or idolatry. Why? The spirits in charge of those sins had been withdrawn. However, the Lord kept mentioning one new problem: covetousness. Not only was greed and materialism the new problem of the people of God, the Lord went further and mentioned the name of the spirit presently luring the hearts of the people of God away from God: mammon. In Matt.6: 24, the Lord disclosed that mammon is the other master that will fight for the heart and the devotion of the people of God and stated that God and mammon cannot be served simultaneously.

*Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

What happened? Satan withdrew Baal and Ashtoreth and replaced them with Mammon. From the days of the Lord on the earth till now, the problem of the church has been materialism and worldly wealth. Many believers are living in disobedience to God because of “business”, “career”, “success and prosperity”. Many ministries have prostituted their assignment in exchange for “prosperity”.

There is a spirit behind it.

Howard Dayton, Jr. wrote that the Lord talked a great deal about money. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of 10 verses (288 in all) deals directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.[\[27\]](#) One can conclude that the influence of the prince of the power of the air is dispersed into the church through mammon.

There is no one living who can claim immunity from the influence of this spirit. Since it is the prince of the power of the air, this spirit dwells in the atmosphere. Simply by breathing in and out, we come in contact with it. Therefore, every believer must constantly be on guard and be disciplined to stand against disobedience.

If a child of God yields ground to sin and does not deal with it according to the word of God, the fellow leaves a wide gate for evil spirits to enter his life and begin to exercise influence over him. Since evil spirits are very subtle in their mode of operation, the fellow would not be aware that things have gone wrong until it is too late. This is where discernment is called for in those who are spiritually matured to quickly call the erring believer to order. Once a believer starts manifesting disobedience and rebellion, Christians should immediately see that the prince of the power of the air is at work, not the Holy Spirit.

Anyone under the influence of this spirit can be used as a “blind witch”, whether he is a believer or not. A blind witch is someone used by Satan for witchcraft activities and the fellow does not even know that he is a witch.[\[28\]](#) The scriptures indicate that there is a link between rebellion and witchcraft. It would seem that rebellion opens the gate for witchcraft spirits to begin operations.

1 Samuel 15:23 -

*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*



*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

It has been established that an evil spirit is behind every act of disobedience. When evil spirits operate, they have only one objective and that is to oppose whatsoever God is doing or wants to do. Since God is the source of all authority and Jesus Christ symbolizes obedience, whosoever is disobedient has aligned himself with Satan, the father of witchcraft.

Disobedience sealed the fate of Saul. Once disobedience entered his life, Satan took over and Saul lost control of his actions. For example, against his will, he kept pursuing David to kill him. Saul made 21 attempts on David's life and at a point he could not understand why he kept on hunting David. In 1 Sam. 26: 21, Saul said,

*Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.*

Saul acknowledged that he sinned; he was behaving foolishly, and had erred exceedingly in pursuing David. One would have thought that after this realization, Saul would have left David alone, no; he still kept on pursuing him. He knew it was wrong, but he could no longer control himself. The moment he rebelled, witchcraft spirits took over his will power.

It is therefore not surprising, that the anointed of the Lord ended up with the witch at Endor. The spirit in him steered him to commune with other witches. It was tragic that Saul had his last meal in the house of a witch before going to fight the battle of the Lord the following day. He had unholy communion with a witch, sat and ate with a witch, before going to serve the Lord.

What brought King Saul so low? It was rebellion.

Every heaven bound child of God must be sensitive to sin, rebellion and presumption. Unfortunately, it is sin that most people seek to avoid, not knowing that rebellion is as dangerous as sin.

- Once a believer loses obedience, he loses Christ.
- Once a believer loses obedience, he receives the prince of the power of the air.
- Once a believer receives the prince of the power of the air, he receives witchcraft spirits.

Intercessors now concur that there is a phenomenon in the church and they describe it as “charismatic witchcraft”. The root is disobedience. The Spirit working in every child of God is the Spirit of obedience and meekness. If any nature contrary to these is manifested, one must strongly resist it. The spiritually matured child of God is known by his level of obedience and submission.

Not only does disobedience open the gate for evil spirits, it equally turns God into the enemy of the believer. Much of the obstacles that believers encounter in the world are not from the devil, but the result of their broken relationships with God. Whenever man disobeys God, relationship with heaven is strained.

An interesting account is recorded in Num. 22. God clearly instructed Balaam not to go to Balak. When the prophet persisted, God told him, “go”. Like a pastor friend said, “Balaam did not know the difference between “go” and “goooo”.

The amazing thing however, is that the first time the word “satan” was used in the Bible, it was not in connection with Lucifer, it was actually with reference to God.

Numbers 22:22

*And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.*

The Hebrew word translated “adversary” is “satan”. God became “satan” to someone who used to fellowship with him because the man disobeyed. Every child of God must train himself or herself to live in obedience. Either way, there

is no gain for the disobedient.

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS SUBMIT TO BAD LEADERS?

Romans 13:1-2

*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. [2] Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

“There is no power but of God”. Every ruler on the earth, good or bad is in power based on divine prerogative. God told Nebuchadnezzar, *the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.* Daniel 4:32

It is part of the working of God in the lives of His children to permit them to serve under a wicked leader in order to teach them submission and humility. Even though the wicked ruler or leader will still receive judgment for his wickedness, for the moment, he serves the purpose of bringing the sons of God to perfection.

As pointed out by Watchman Nee, if a delegated authority misrepresents God, God will vindicate Himself. If a leader handles authority in a manner that heaven does not approve, God will prove that He did not send him. The highest goal in the universe is the vindication of God. In ages to come, God must be vindicated as righteous, pure, holy, merciful, forgiving and loving. This is the reason why God did not suddenly destroy Satan and his hosts of wickedness. God wants to show clearly that the eternal punishment that is inflicted upon Lucifer is justly deserved.

There are times when the wicked flourish in their wickedness and it seems God does not see it. God has given man sufficient time for repentance so that in eternity, when the stories of the present times are being considered, no one would cry that God was unfair to him.

Therefore, when children of God find themselves under the yoke of a tyrant, in the church or outside the church, the best thing to do is to pray and learn the lessons that God wants them to learn. Every crisis comes with a lesson encoded inside it. The best prayer to pray in such situations is: “Lord, what are you teaching me through these experiences?”

1 Peter 3:14-17 *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; ... [17] For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

1 Peter 2:18-21 *Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. [19] For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. [20] For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. [21] For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:*

## SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

There is a difference between holding an office and representing God. What every minister of the gospel should strive to achieve is the privilege of representing God, not having mere titles or holding big offices in the church. A man representing God speaks and heaven sanctions what he says.

It is possible for a man to be holding a big spiritual position in the church, yet he has no spiritual authority. It is also possible for a man who used to hold spiritual authority to lose it due to unacceptable conduct before God. Such a one would still continue to hold the spiritual office but would have lost the authority which he used to receive from God. It has to take the spiritually discerning in the church to recognize that the authority has gone.

In 1 Sam. 3: 19-20 and 1 Sam. 4: 1, the word of Samuel became the word of God.

1 Samuel 3:19 *And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his*

*words fall to the ground.*

1 Samuel 4:1 *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.*

Eli was the High Priest and he was still alive. He had been High Priest for many years, exercising authority on behalf of God. However, because of improper handling of the affairs of the priesthood, God rejected him. Even though physically, Eli was still holding the spiritual office, the spiritual authority had passed to Samuel who was still a child.

God established a charge against Eli that Eli did not honor Him, but rather despised Him. (1 Sam. 2: 30) As far as God was concerned, Eli honored his sons more than God. There are ministers of the gospel in this generation who honor other things more than God. To some, it is money and wealth, to others it is the praises and adulation of men, while others do not wish to lose their human connections. Whenever a man honors anything more than God, the Spirit of Jealousy is provoked and God cuts off His power from such a one.

Another worthy example of a minister who had spiritual authority but had no office was Elijah. There were many priests in the land but Elijah was introduced as Tishbite not Levite. There was no record that Elijah descended from the Levitical priesthood. Yet, only Elijah could say “by my word”. In other words, “I decree”, and the decree stood firm. Elijah possessed spiritual authority but he had no Levitical office.

To show that with God, consistency in doing His will is the key to receive as well as sustain spiritual authority, when Elijah did the unexpected, as far as God was concerned, (he ran away from Jezebel) God confronted him on Mount Horeb with an incredulous question: “Elijah, what are you doing here?” God could not believe that His champion for the moment would yield ground to a threat by a sinful woman. Twice, God asked the same question. (1 Kgs. 19: 9,13)

Apparently, the explanation of Elijah was not satisfactory to God. The next

statement from the Most High was the handing over procedure of Elijah and the appointment of Elisha. The prophet lost both spiritual authority and spiritual position in one moment.

Another very compelling example is found in the New Testament. After the resurrection of the Lord, spiritual authority was evidently demonstrated the most by Peter. He it was who preached the evangelistic messages that won thousands of souls into the church, he pulled the lame man to his feet at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3: 1-7), executed judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11), his shadow carried so much anointing that it was healing the sick, (Acts 5: 15), he healed Aeneas of eight years paralysis, (Acts 9: 33-34), and raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9: 40). It would seem that Peter would continue to wax stronger and stronger in spiritual authority.

Then came Acts 10: 9-16, and Peter told God, "Not so, Lord". From that moment till the end of the New Testament, there is not a single record of Peter performing any miracle neither was any significant move of God accomplished through him. Rather, he was publicly rebuked by Paul as recorded in Galatians 2: 14. The authority of God now moved to a man named Paul, who the first time he encountered the Lord, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9: 6. From that day on, Paul did not look back.

Obedience means more to God than all our faith, worship, giving, and even sacrifices. God called us to obey Him first and foremost before all other things we offer can make meaning to Him. As important as faith is to God, obedience seems to occupy a higher rung on the ladder. For example, faith gives us access into the Presence of God, but obedience gives us a seat. It is not enough to have access into the Presence of God; we should also aspire to be constantly found there.

Faith can call Him, "Lord, Lord," but it is obedience that will do what He says. Luke 6:46 *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?* It is clear that faith without obedience is not satisfactory to God.

A matured believer is obedient to the will of God. He cares less about what people say or think, his heart is steadfast to do the will of God.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

#### LOVE NOT THE WORLD

*“Only when Christians have learned to be satisfied with all their portion in Christ will they be able to overcome those things that the world has to offer. As long as they are satisfied with those things that the world offers, they are not satisfied with Christ.”*

There seems to be a paradox in God’s attitude to the world, when viewed casually by an undiscerning observer. John 3: 16 tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Yet, in 1 Jn. 2: 15, the same scripture instructs, “love not the world”.

Why would God love something and yet command us not to love it? If God so loved the world, that He could sacrifice His only Son, why then did He command His people not to love the world? The answer could be there are different meanings attached to the word “world”.

What exactly is the world?

Two major Greek words are translated world in the New Testament. They are:

*Aion* – age, that is, this age. E.g. Eph. 1: 21

*Kosmos* – arrangement, order, beauty.

A closer look at *kosmos* shows that it is applied in three different ways in the scriptures. An understanding of these different applications of the same word will



enable a better understanding of the “world”.

- The word “world” is used to refer to the material planet earth. Matt. 13: 35; John 1: 10; Mark 16: 15
- It is also used to refer to the people living on earth as the world. Jn. 3: 16; 12: 19; 17: 21. This reference also includes the whole race of men alienated from God and hostile to Jesus Christ. Jn. 14: 17; 14: 27; 15: 18
- World affairs, goods, riches, and pleasures that seduce people from God. Matt. 16: 26; 1 Jn. 15-17[[29](#)]

The paradox in the love of God for the world is easily explained when the threefold application of the word “world” is highlighted as seen above. God loved the “people” of the world; the human race that was enslaved by Satan when Adam fell into sin. At the same time, God hates the world affairs, the arrangement, the order, and the pleasures that seduce people away from God.

The church in this generation seems to have reversed this standard established by God. By not placing priority attention on missions and penetration of the places currently unreached with the gospel, the church indicates it neither cares for, nor loves the people of the world. On the other hand, by placing premium attention on the pleasures and the material wealth of the world, it shows that it loves the world, contrary to the command of God in 1 Jn. 2: 15-17. This strongly suggests that the church and God are operating back-to-back.

Behind the “order” referred to in *kosmos*, there is a mind. There is a mind that introduced, organized, and sustains the arrangement that has been put in place in the world. The word of God reveals that entity as the prince of this world.

John 14: 30 *Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*

John 16:11 *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

Satan has a stranglehold upon the world and he is not willing to let it go. He is prepared to fight tooth and nail to keep the human race in bondage to himself

and avoid the reign of Christ which translates to his eternal doom.

1 John 5:19 *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*

Christians must be aware that in touching the world, they encounter a system that is opposed to God. The world system was put in place the moment man fell and Satan took over the administration on the earth. Since Satan is hostile to God, he introduced a system of governance that reflects his character and hatred for God.

All over the world, there is poverty, sickness, immorality, violence, hatred, and hypocrisy; destruction of lives and property, chaos instead of order. The children of the world who prosper in the world are those who have mastered the craft of cheating and subverting. A popular novel, *The Godfather*, written by Mario Puzo started with this statement: Behind Every Great Fortune, there is a Crime. All these are the characters of Satan manifested in his kingdom.

That is why the scriptures warn in James 4: 4 - *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

The world system was designed to hate God and oppose His will. Globally, there is uniform resistance to Bible believing Christianity and a deliberate perversion of the moral standards laid down in the word of God. In every nation, majority of the people are fiercely opposed to God either as a result of competing religious belief, ideological convictions, or cultural values. Wherever genuine representatives of God show up, they are either killed, hounded, or persecuted.

John 15:18 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

A mature believer sees the world through the eyes of God. He acknowledges that he is in the world, but he does not belong to the world. He acknowledges that he is an alien in a foreign land and must reflect the values of his homeland. A truly matured child of God sees the world as a pilgrimage and therefore, he is not expected to make any long term plan since any moment, he could be going

home. In using the things of the world, he touches them as functional items and not as objects that merit his devotion and adoration.

1 Cor. 7: 31 *And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Satan opposes God, not only through sin and flesh, but also through the world. The operational system of the world is designed to oppose God. This further explains why governments of the world have banned prayers in government controlled schools, approved abortion, exalted culture and tradition to state departments (even though culture and traditions are demonism in disguise), sanctioned control of the church as separation of church and the state, and engage in politics of deceit and pretense in running the affairs of the world. Even the people of the world do not trust the politicians.

Many believers are wary of sin, but few are wary of the world. Most believers do not know the difference between living in the world and belonging to the world. The scriptures point out in Jam. 4: 4, making friends with the world makes one an instant enemy of God. Therefore the question that believers need to ask constantly as they reside on this side of eternity is: what is of the world and what is not of the world? In dressing, spending, planning, living, matured believers should be aware of what constitutes friendship with the world and what does not.

As mentioned earlier, there are three forces of darkness which oppose God on the earth. They are:

- Satan and his hosts of darkness
- The flesh
- The world

These three forces of darkness directly oppose each member of the Godhead.

- Satan and his hosts of darkness oppose Jesus Christ – 1 Cor. 2: 8
- The flesh opposes the Holy Spirit – Gal. 5: 17

- The world opposes God the Father – Jam. 4: 4

In having a world system that is antithetical to God's nature, Satan aims at rubbishing and ridiculing the perfect human society which God had in mind when He created Adam. The existing world system is absolutely opposed to God's intention and purposes such that God has made up His mind to destroy everything in the world and renovate it by fire. Subsequently, as the Most High said, "*Behold, I make all things new.*" Rev. 21: 5.

Every Christian should be aware that they are operating simultaneously in two spheres. They operate in the sphere of the kingdom of God headed by Jesus Christ while they are living in the realm of the world headed by Lucifer. Believers in Christ Jesus are not members of the system headed by Lucifer, even though physically they live in the world. It is imperative that believers understand this fact so that they will not live in the world like children of the world. Christians are to conduct themselves as ambassadors for God, which in reality that is who they are.

Therefore, the issue of salvation transcends forgiveness of sins or an escape from hell. Salvation is evidenced by a clear exit from one kingdom and commitment to another kingdom. The proof that one is genuinely saved is that the individual is markedly not of this world in conduct and in attitude. Those who claim to be saved yet conduct themselves after the fashion and standards of the world shall be surprised when they face the Lord.

The key to overcome the world is found in John 17: 14-17

*I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [15] I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. [16] They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. [17] Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

The key to living in the world and yet not be of the world is *sanctification*. To be sanctified means to be separated from sin and evil and consecrated to God and to

His ways. The key word is separation.

In the days when we were unbelievers in the University, drinking of beer and partying was the norm amongst most of the unbelieving students. In those days, the “born again” movement was not as widespread as it is now. Bible believing Christians were tagged SU (Scripture Union).

Since alcohol produces recklessness and a false sense of bravado, the male students found it easier after a few bottles of beer to chat up any girl that caught their fancy. However, no matter how drunk a male student was, in those days, if he saw an SU sister, he would not go near her. There was something about them that would tell the drunkard, “wrong number; don’t press”.

If you saw a SU brother at the bus stop waiting by the side of the road, he says nothing, but you know immediately, “this one belongs to Jesus”. It was amazing. You will just know. Sanctification. It is rarely observed in professing Christians anymore. Some people will tell you that they are Christians and your response will be, “Are you serious?”

Any believer who does not make separation from the things of the world a priority cannot make heaven. God demands it. 2 Cor. 6: 14-18

*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, [18] And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

The word of God is the basis for separation. John 17:17 *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.* Every heaven bound child of God must pattern his life based on New Testament principles and commands. Christians must live above the covetousness of the world and adopt the standard of Godly contentment as a rule for living.

Christian women must adopt modesty in apparels as the God given standard for dressing and not the vanity prone fashion of the world. Laying up treasures in heaven must take precedence over the lust for earthly wealth and possessions

which is currently advocated by the “prosperity messengers” behind the pulpit.

Expanding the kingdom of God through soul winning must become the consuming passion of every ministry and not the worldly race to build cathedrals and multiply ministry vehicles, and more recently, private jets.

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS CONTEST WORLDLY ELECTIONS?

In recent times, headlines such as, “My Pastor encouraged me to go into politics” have been seen in weekend magazines. One has also heard one or two pastors publicly encouraging the members of their congregations to take part in politics. Their concern is that Christians need to be in government to set a good standard of Godly governance. The intention is good, but is it scripturally approved?

As pointed out earlier, there are two kingdoms in which Christians live on the earth. The kingdom of God headed by Jesus Christ and the kingdom of the world headed by Satan. Every man born of the seed of Adam was born into the kingdom of the world headed by Lucifer, which made every one on earth a member of his kingdom before salvation. The only exception was Jesus Christ, Who was born of the seed of the Holy Ghost.

Membership in the kingdom of the world is by birth, not by application, invitation or coercion. It is simply by birth. Also, there is no neutrality, neither is there resignation nor another option. Once you are born of the seed of Adam, you belong to the kingdom of the world.

Death is the only way out of that kingdom. For anyone to be released as a member of the kingdom of the world, the fellow must experience death, because, *“For he that is dead is freed from sin”* Rom. 6: 7. Unfortunately, whoever dies as a full fledged member of the kingdom of the world spends eternity in hell with the forces of darkness.

Since birth is the entrance and the death is the exit, God in His mercy became flesh, of the seed of the Holy Ghost in the divine attempt to save man. Jesus

Christ died on the cross on behalf of man and accomplished the strategy to enable man escape from the kingdom of the world. On the day that Christ was crucified, I died with Him. You also died with Him. Everyone who genuinely accepts Him as Lord and Savior, died with Him on the cross. His death is credited to every believer in Christ.

Romans 6:3-4 *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? [4] Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Romans 6:7 *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

Romans 6:8 *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:*

When Christ died, I died. That death is my exit from the kingdom of Satan, since the only exit is through death. Now if I remained dead, I am no longer of use to God in the world, since God needs me as His ambassador to expand the kingdom of God on earth. Holy Spirit comes in, and like He raised Jesus from the dead, He gives me a new birth, or if you like, a second birth. This is what it means to be “born again”. It is only what is not living that can be born. What is alive or existing can no longer be born. For me to be “born again”, it implies that my first life has been terminated. If I was not dead before, I cannot be “born again”.

The first life was a natural life and it ended on the cross. Now a supernatural life begins with the resurrection of Christ. That is the reason that the Lord could say, John 3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* Before, I was born of the flesh, but now, I am born of the Spirit.

Now that I am “born again” by the Spirit of God, I am born into the kingdom of God headed by Jesus Christ. Ephes. 2:19 *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; ...* From the moment one is born again, he ceases to be a child of the world, he becomes a

member of the kingdom of God.

Now, as a member of the kingdom of God, what is his business in running the kingdom of the world? He has being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the light. His citizenship has changed.

It is true that Christ has made us priests and kings. However, there are two principles on which reigning in a kingdom are based:

- You must have a kingdom before you can reign.
- You can only reign in your own kingdom. Cases have been heard of traditional rulers from Nigeria who travel to Britain and use the tube. Nobody recognizes them. Why? Britain is not their kingdom. In Britain they are not recognized as kings.

Is the world the kingdom of the child of God? No, it is not. So, the child of God cannot reign here. The Lord confirmed this in the presence of Pilate,

*John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

If our Master rejected the kingdom of this world, and taught us to pray that God's kingdom, which is our kingdom, should come, why would any child of God belabor himself striving to reign or rule in the kingdom of Satan?

Even if any child of God is determined to rule in the world, Satan will not agree unless that fellow first bows to him. Of course, whoever bows to Satan is cut off from the Lord. We can refer to the encounter between the Lord and the devil in the wilderness.

*Luke 4:5-8 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. [6] And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. [7] If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. [8] And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt*



*worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

When the devil claimed that all the power and glory of the kingdom of the world has been given to him, and he can give it to whosoever he wills, the Lord did not contest that claim, because in truth, it was handed over to him by Adam. All that Satan demanded was for the Lord to bow to him in exchange for a throne in the world. If the devil could be so bold to demand God to bow to him on the earth, who is that believer that wants to win an election and claim that he will not bow to the devil?

(Of course, this does not negate God's overriding prerogative in the appointment of rulers on the earth as God told Nebuchadnezzar. Every activity on the earth is governed by God. If not for God's divine intervention, Satan would have multiplied the Hitlers and the Stalins of this world and released nuclear bombs to wipe out the entire human race.)

For people to claim that some Christians are in politics and they are doing very well is not consistent with the word of God. Did God call them Christians? Because someone shows up in church every Sunday does not make him a Christian. If they are truly Christians, why have they not used their influence to stop corruption? It should not be forgotten that politicians are chameleons. If he is truly a Christian he will not be in worldly politics. The Spirit in him will not inspire him to go into politics; the Spirit will rather steer him into the mission field to fulfill the Great Commission.

## HOW CAN CHRISTIANS CHANGE THE WORLD?

Let us illustrate with American diplomats living in Nigeria. The diplomats are part and parcel of the Nigerian society. Whatever happens in Nigeria affects them, whether it is good or bad, but they retain their identity that they are not Nigerians. "They are in Nigeria, but they are not of Nigeria." If there should be crisis in the Nigerian government, the most that the diplomats will do is file

reports back to their capital in Washington D.C.

It is the prerogative of the American government to decide how America will intervene in the Nigerian crisis. If they like, they could work through United Nations, or send a special emissary, or send the CIA. The decision to intervene is at the discretion of the home government. If the Nigeria crisis escalates too much and it could injure the representatives of America in the country, the American government will send an aircraft and evacuate its citizens. (Rapture)

However, the American diplomats in Nigeria will not join in the local election or contest an elective post. Even though they are capable of doing a better job at running the government of Nigeria than the Nigerian politicians, they will not participate. Why? It is not their kingdom. If any American diplomat should venture into Nigerian politics, when he finishes his term, he can no longer return to America. Through participating in the local elections, he has changed his citizenship; he is no longer an American citizen.

Like the American diplomat, whenever Christians see issues in the world that are wrong, they are meant to file a report to their government in heaven through prayers and not by contesting elections. No heaven bound child of God should venture into world politics, or else he will move out of the sphere of the kingdom of God back into the realm of the kingdom of Satan. Remember, a servant cannot serve two masters. There is nothing like dual citizenship in this matter.

So, how will the world change? God is not interested in changing the world, He wants to destroy it. The world system created by Lucifer is bankrupt and irredeemable. All that concerns God is to save His people and when their number is complete, He will evacuate His own to commence the judgment upon the world.

The word of God describes believers as “ambassadors for Christ”. 2 Cor. 5: 20. This designation goes beyond representing Christ as Savior; it also extends to representing Him as the King of the kingdom of God. An ambassador for the kingdom of God cannot involve himself with the government of the kingdom of

the world.

It would seem that God is desirous of showing the New Testament saint he is not a citizen of the world, when one considers the words used to describe saints. Another word used to describe believers is “pilgrim”. The Greek word translated pilgrim means “a resident foreigner”. Christians are foreigners in the world. Believers must develop heaven consciousness and always remember that this world is not their home. Would a pilgrim to Israel seek to participate in the politics of the nation?

If, while on his pilgrimage, he notices that something is wrong with the nation of Israel, the most he could do is to pray for God’s intervention. Even if he is the most skillful negotiator and an accomplished technocrat, he cannot dabble into the local politics. This is the exact way that Christians are required to handle the affairs of the world. All that the scripture commands believers to do is petition heaven for divine intervention in the affairs of the world.

1 Tim. 2:1-2 *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; [2] For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

2 Tim. 2:4 *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Therefore, instead of busying oneself with the government of the kingdom of the world, a heavenly focused child of God would do better by becoming a missionary or a serious soul winner so that the gospel will be preached faster and the Lord will come quickly. Then, all those who truly desire to reign will reign with Christ for all of eternity. Which one is better, to reign as president in the world for eight years or to reign with Christ for eternity?

When pastors inundate believers with messages of wealth and relevance in the kingdom of the world, little do they realize that they are destroying the souls of the people. It should not be forgotten that 3 Jn. 1: 2 refers to the prosperity of the

soul.

*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*

The main objective of the gospel is to save the soul of man from eternal destruction. Jesus Christ made this clear when He said, *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Matthew 16:26

The people of God must be taught the following:

1. Even though they are in the world, they are not of the world. Their rightful status is that of a pilgrim and an ambassador of God on earth.
2. Believers must learn to differentiate and set the boundary line between what constitutes the world and what is of the kingdom of God.
3. They must be trained to always take decisions that will favor the kingdom of God to the detriment of the world and not vice versa.
4. They must be taught to invest less in the world and more in the kingdom of God. Matthew 6:19-21 *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: [20] But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: [21] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
5. The values of the world must be de-emphasized in the church as the yardstick for measuring success and achievement. The church must learn, again, to recognize the values of God and utilize such values to award merit. Only then, can spirituality be restored into the church.
6. Christians must be taught to pray more for the world to limit the activities of Satan and bring divine solutions to the problems created by the forces of darkness.

7. Christians must be mobilized to actively participate in global evangelization as the only solution to global problems. When the harvest of souls is complete, the Prince of Peace shall come and put a final end to every form of satanic rascality.

Finally, Col. 3:1-4 *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. [2] Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. [3] For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. [4] When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

A matured believer separates himself from the world.

Are you separated from the world?

## 4<sup>th</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### FRUITFUL CHRISTIAN LIFE

*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: ... John 15:16*

When the Hermeneutics Law of First Mention is applied to the creation of man, it appears that the first time God spoke to man He laid the parameter which He will use to assess man's performance upon the earth. (Hermeneutics refers to methods and principles used to interpret and understand the Bible. Among its tools are: Law of First Mention, Law of Double Reference, and so on.)

The Law of First Mention stipulates that if you want to interpret correctly any doctrine or subject in the Bible, refer to the first time that incident was recorded. The foundational incident will set the pattern for subsequent occurrences in the scriptures. It is with the Law of First Mention that God's mind and will concerning marriage is better understood.

The first time that God spoke to man, in Gen. 1: 28, He gave His standard as well as His expectation concerning man.

Genesis 1:28 *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

The first time God spoke directly to man, He did not talk about worship, He did not mention love, He did not talk of giving, and neither did He mention warfare. He stated clearly, "Be fruitful ..." It would appear that God's purpose for placing

man on planet earth has to be quickly made clear to him in an unequivocal language.

The statement “Be fruitful” is not an advice, neither is it a suggestion or God’s opinion. It was evidently a command. The first word that proceeded from the mouth of the Most High to His new creation was a clear instruction which man was meant to comply with throughout the ages. On the earth, man must be fruitful.

After commanding man to be fruitful, the next statement was equally a command: “and multiply”. God must have been in haste after creating man to see bountiful results from His creation on the earth. It is interesting to note that God did not instruct man to be fruitful and increase, or to be fruitful and move forward, or to be fruitful and add to his fruitfulness. He said, “and multiply”.

There is a clear difference between addition and multiplication. Without venturing into the complexities of geometry and algebra, simple arithmetic would reveal the mind of God concerning the newly created race. Using the five fingers of man, it is possible to take a five step calculation to demonstrate the difference between man adding to fruitfulness and man multiplying fruitfulness. We shall utilize 2 as the base figure because God started with two people.

First, let us consider addition:

Step 1:	(the thumb)	$2+2 =$	4
Step 2:	(index finger)	$4+4 =$	8
Step 3:	(middle finger)	$8+8 =$	16
Step 4:	(gentle finger)	$16+16 =$	32
Step 5:	(little finger)	$32+32 =$	64

Using the simple arithmetic formula of addition, there has been an increase in fruitfulness, but it can only be considered marginal. After taking five steps, man has increased from 2 to 64.

Now, let us consider the formula of the Almighty God, multiplication.

Step 1:  $2 \times 2 = 4$

Step 2:  $4 \times 4 = 16$

Step 3:  $16 \times 16 = 256$

Step 4:  $256 \times 256 = 65,536$

Step 5:  $65,536 \times 65,536 = 4,294,967,296$

If man heeded the command of God to multiply, by the time man takes five steps, he has surpassed 4 billion! If man keys in to the perfect will of God, man will not only be fruitful, but he will multiply and abound beyond measure.

While Adam failed to achieve this divine ideal, Jesus Christ confirmed to us that it is true. In fact, He started alone. He started without a human partner. After three years in the ministry, he only had twelve followers, then He went back again to zero. They all forsook Him and fled after He was arrested. He died, rose from the dead to meet eleven out of the original twelve and He returned to heaven. But today, if one should number His fruit on the earth alone, not counting those who have gone to heaven, no one would be left in doubt that Jesus was fruitful and He multiplied.

When a believer attains to the level of spiritual maturity, whatever assignment that God has given him shall bear evidence of fruitfulness. Therefore, we must not be satisfied with bearing fruit; we must strive to ensure that we multiply in fruitfulness.

Wherever one notices a believer that is not bearing fruit, one is evidently looking at a believer that is not matured. As pointed out in the first chapter, whatever is matured bears fruit. It is a law in nature that every living organism seeks to reproduce itself. If one looks at this law carefully, it implies that whatever does not seek to reproduce itself is not living. Could one therefore conclude that the so called Bible believing Christians, who throng living churches, and yet are not fruitful for the Lord are like the church in Sardis, which has a name that it liveth,



yet it is dead? Rev. 3: 1

Every believer must constantly remember that man was created to be fruitful. Therefore, every individual in the church is expected to be fruitful and to multiply the fruitfulness. God did not create anyone useless or incompetent. Every member of the body of Christ has a specific function to perform that will result in fruitfulness for the kingdom of God. The mind of the Creator towards man is that of bearing good fruit.

## WHAT CAN PROPEL FRUITFULNESS?

The first step for an individual to work towards fruitfulness is to recognize that he is created for a purpose. Life was entrusted to us by a Supreme Being for a specific period of time, for the purpose of fulfilling certain obligations. It is therefore incorrect for any man to permit the world to dictate the purpose of his existence. The world did not create us; therefore, it is incapable of defining the purpose of our existence.

God made clear the purpose of man's existence in Ephes. 2:10 *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Every human being on the earth was created in Jesus Christ for good works. John 1:3 *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* Unfortunately, the world has sought to impose its values on man and the end of pursuing such worldly values is vanity and a chasing after the wind.

Secondly, after acknowledging that he was created by God for a specific purpose, man needs to identify that purpose in order to fulfill it. It is not sufficient to live in the consciousness that life has a purpose without a clear definition of the purpose.

Before the Lord was born, angel Gabriel revealed His purpose to Joseph in Matt. 1: 21. "... He shall save His people from their sins". When the Lord Himself

arrived, He amplified His purpose in Luke 19: 10, that He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

In John 15: 16, the Lord revealed the purpose of God for every believer thus:

*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

Man was created by God to be fruitful. Man was redeemed by Christ to be fruitful. The relationship between the Creator and man is sustained by the fruitfulness of the created being. When one looks at Jn. 15: 16 closely, it seems that the key to answered prayer is tied to fruitfulness; not just faith or persistence in prayer.

The fruitfulness that the Lord has in mind is the salvation of souls. The purpose He came was to seek and save the lost, and the same assignment is what He handed over to His church as the Great Commission. Every believer is meant to be active in directly winning souls or facilitating the salvation of souls into the kingdom of God. When believers bear much fruit, the Lord acknowledges them as His disciples.

John 15:8 *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

If fruitfulness according to the standard of the Almighty God is emphasized in every Christian assembly, the entire world would have been evangelized many times over. Unfortunately, what most ministers focus on is using Biblical principles and doctrines to achieve fruitfulness in the world with the result that believers are fast losing spiritual power.

LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND LOOK

What do you see? What did the Lord command the New Testament saint to lift

his eyes and look at? Is it earthly mansions? Is it wealth, promotion and fame?

John 4: 35 *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*

The Lord commanded His followers to look on the harvest field. Believers are looking at the vanities of the world. We are meant to see the multitudes in the world perishing and lost without hope in eternity unless salvation gets to them through Jesus Christ. Missionaries were telling us in 1993 that if the harvest was ripe 2000 years ago, by today, they would be rotten. The rottenness of the harvest is evidenced in the various calamities that have befallen the human race in this generation.

A spiritually matured believer is consumed with a passion to win souls and expand the kingdom of God. Since for this purpose the Son of God was made manifest, that He might destroy the works of the devil, whoever is spiritually matured into Christ is constantly destroying the works of the devil and delivering the souls held captive by the forces of darkness. This he does, not with a fake gospel message, but with the message of repentance and forsaking sin.

Jacquelyn K. Heasley said, "If you teach men that God is the source of their pleasure and sin is the source of their pain, they will run to God and away from sin."

Lift up your eyes and look at the world the way God sees it. How can someone claim to be a servant of Christ and yet he does not see what his Master is seeing? How can such a one serve his Master effectively? It is sad to hear some pastors say that they are not called to missions.

"Not called!" did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear Him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and

servants and masters not to come there. Then look Christ in the face - whose mercy you have professed to obey - and tell Him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish His mercy to the world.” - William Booth

Some ministers are spiritually base; they deride and scorn missionaries. Yet there are still some who are the Ananias and Sapphira of this generation who would raise offerings for missions and divert the funds to their pet projects in the church. The world is hurting and matured believers are needed to efficiently represent Christ to those the enemy is holding captive.

Consider the following facts:

- 400 million people on verge of starvation
- 1.3 billion people – no safe water
- 1.1 billion – no adequate shelter
- 1.5 billion – no medical care
- 40,000 children under 5 will die today from malnutrition & sickness[\[30\]](#)

In addition,

- 2.5 billion souls have not heard the gospel
- It is estimated that there are over 88 million unevangelized beggars in the world. (As seen in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the soul of the destitute is as valuable in heaven as the soul of the rich.)
- There are estimated 22 million prostitutes in the world

Stan Parks identifies other areas of humanitarian disasters, worldwide:

- Wars: over 100 primarily ethnic wars - 90% of casualties are civilians

- Increase of Terrorism
- Fundamentalist / Mainline / Modernist conflict in major religions
- Increasing CHEs – complex humanitarian emergencies[\[31\]](#)

This generation of believers need spiritual champions like General William Booth of Salvation Army, who said, “While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight - I'll fight to the very end!”

A matured Christian carries the burden that is on the heart of the Lord. The Lord carried the burden to the cross where He surrendered His life for the salvation of the human race. The early Christians continued where the Lord stopped and also laid down their lives for the purpose of the gospel. In our generation, few are willing to die for the gospel. But they forget, sooner or later, they will die, and then what happens? "The question is not whether you will die; but the question is, "Will the death you die bear much fruit?" - John Piper

If your life has not been useful to the Lord, your death will not be missed in the world. A life that continues to be relevant long after it is gone is the life that was surrendered to do the will of God.

## A GLOBAL VIEW

A matured believer maintains a global view of the body of Christ and sees the needs in distance places with the same gravity with which he views the needs in his local assembly. A lot of the ministers of the gospel have a myopic view of the church. They see the needs in their ministries only and will not respond even to the needs in their neighborhood or country. The claim usually is, “God did not

send me there”. Others would say, “Have I finished the one I am doing here?” Still some ask rhetorically, “are there not other people there who would attend to those needs?”

The unfortunate thing about the programs they are busy doing is that those programs are mostly of the flesh aimed at projecting the image of the pastor as a “successful” minister of the gospel. The things they are concerned with most are: buying land, constructing a cathedral, buying church bus, then starting a fee paying school, starting a branch in U.S. or in U.K.; and of course, buying state of the art vehicles. If they are in America or U.K., they want to start a branch in comfortable places like southern Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya or South Africa. Then, they will proclaim, “We are into missions.” Pastors in the previous generations went into missions to expand the kingdom of God. Most of the pastors in this generation go into “missions” to project their images.

Consider this story, which I had the chance to witness and intervene. My family had the opportunity to worship in this local assembly in Lagos for a few months before returning to our missions station. Shortly after we joined this local assembly, a brother in the fellowship approached me for assistance. He was a missionary recently returned home from Cameroun. He had started a work there but he ran out of funds to sustain himself, so he had to return to Nigeria with the hope of raising funds. When he reported at the ministry that sent him to Cameroun, he was posted to a branch of the ministry that he would be taken care of there.

As of the time he arrived at the church branch, the local assembly was involved in the construction of a cathedral therefore the senior pastor welcomed him and told him to be patient. He had been patient for some months before we arrived. When he heard me talk of missions and the need for Christians to be more active in missions, he felt I could assist him explain and appeal to the senior pastor so that he could receive the assistance that he needed for his mission field.

When I heard of his story, I was shocked that such a situation could exist in the church. He needed 35,000 naira to enable him return to the mission field. When we arrived in the local assembly, we heard the senior pastor announce from the pulpit that over 28 million naira had been spent on the building project, which as of that time, was only a structure. The flooring, finishing, painting, air conditioning, altar decoration, and so on, had not been done. What had been accomplished were the foundation, the pillars, the wall and the roof. Even at that level, 28m naira had been spent.

I tried to figure it out, but could not. If a local assembly could afford 28m to construct a shell, how could it find it difficult to raise 35,000 naira for a missionary? So, I called the brother and together we went to meet the senior pastor. When he saw us, he remembered immediately that the brother needed 35,000 naira for a mission field. “Don’t worry”, he assured us, “when the Church Administrator comes, you will be given the money.”

So we left, sure it was settled. No, it was not. The Church Administrator actually came, but the brother was not given the money, but funds were being poured into the building project. Shortly after, we had to return to our missions station, and I lost contact with the brother.

A few months later, I met the missionary at a Christian gathering in Lagos and I asked him how he was faring in Cameroun. Very sadly, he replied,

“I did not return to the mission field.”

“Why? What happened?”

“I was not given the money that I needed.”

“You were not given 35,000 naira in that church!? Where are you now?”

“I have been posted to another branch in Lagos.”

“The souls that you had gathered in Cameroun, what happened to them?”

“I don’t know, Pastor. I don’t know.”

The local assembly ended up spending well over 40 million naira to construct the cathedral. It is an imposing edifice on the landscape. It remains a big stamp of denominational achievement and “success”, but the same church could not release 35,000 naira for soul winning where it was needed most. In effect, millions were spent to do what Jesus did not send any pastor to do, while 35,000 naira could not be released to do what the Lord commanded should be done!

The Lord will not tell any minister of the gospel on the last day, “well done, thou good and faithful servant. I saw the cathedral that you built. It was magnificent. Enter into the joy of thy Lord.” There will be no reward in heaven for constructing cathedrals, or for purchasing a fleet of jeeps and other exotic ministry vehicles. The money that heaven is releasing for global evangelization and salvation of souls is being squandered recklessly by ministers of the gospel to make a name for themselves in the world. Would a man make a name for himself in the world and become a nonentity in the eternal kingdom of God? The only people that will be rewarded eternally are the soul winners; there is no recognition for cathedral builders in heaven.

Christians, as someone rightly observes, “are majoring in the minor while they minor in the major.”

As of 2009, about 15,900 ethnic groups have been identified in the world. Out of this figure, about 6,400 ethnic groups are yet to be reached with the gospel. According to Matthew 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* “The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become.” - Henry Martyn,

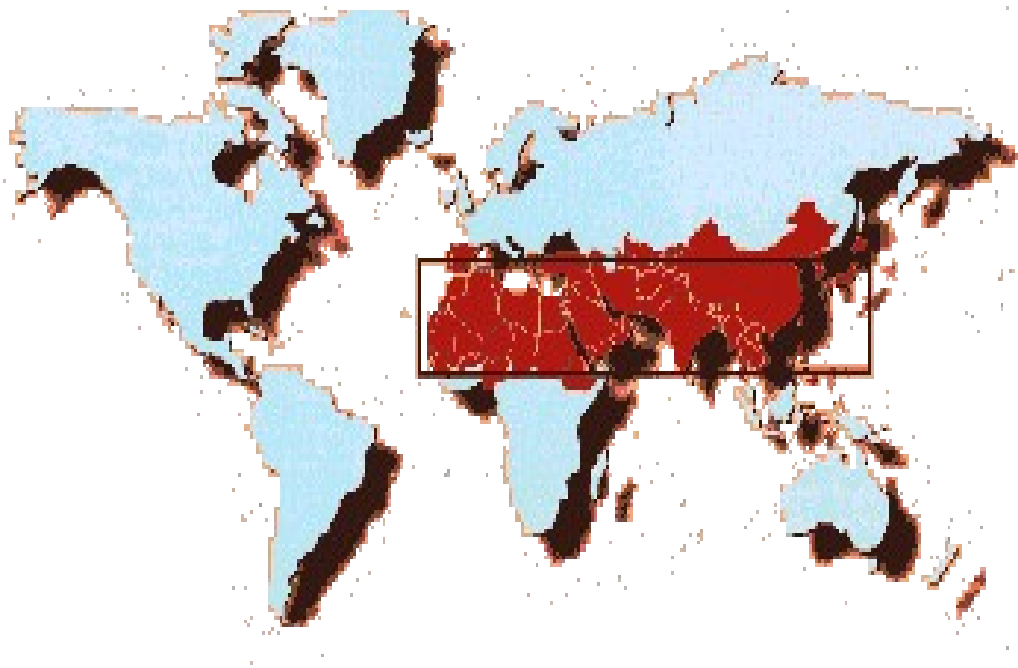


<b>Country</b>	<b># Peoples Total</b>	<b># Unreached Peoples</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>2334</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>413</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>292</b>

*Source: Operation Joshua*

Reaching the remaining ethnic groups which are heavily concentrated in the countries above (other countries have lesser numbers of unreached people groups) involves a global Christian action because these countries are located in the 10/40 Window. This is the area in the world that is most hostile to Christianity. Satan is keeping the 10/40 Window tightly shut to frustrate the return of Jesus Christ.

## The 10/40 Window



*Source: Operation Joshua*

In this resistance belt are concentrated the spiritual strongholds viciously hostile to Christianity. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Animism, are all in the 10/40 Window. So long as ministers of the gospel maintain a myopic view of the church, the 2.5 billion souls trapped in the 10/40 Window will not freely receive the gospel.

Tom Julien points out, “It is one of the great tragedies of church history — the divorce between the church and her mission. Today few churches even know that the divorce occurred, making it even more painful. The separation has persisted so long that it seems normal.”

Believers have no other option but to develop a global view of the church. Jesus handed over to the church a global mandate. “Go ye into all the earth and preach the gospel.” It is a call for disciples to see the church from the perspective of heaven. Missions is not an option for Christians, it is the basis of a fruitful relationship with the Lord. “God is a missionary God. The Bible is a missionary book. The Gospel is a missionary message. The church is a missionary

institution. And when the church ceases to be missionary minded, it has denied its faith and betrayed its trust.” – J. Herbert Kane

I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light - John Keith Falconer

We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first. -  
Oswald J. Smith

No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once. - Oswald J. Smith

## 5<sup>th</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Philip. 2:5*

Christ made Himself of no reputation. Philip. 2:7. That is, He emptied Himself. The Greek word for emptying is *kenoo*. It means, to *make empty*, to *abase*, *neutralize*: - make (of none effect, of no reputation, void), be in vain. [\[32\]](#) Christ deliberately emptied Himself to be the Saviour of man.

What are some of the things that Christ emptied Himself of?

- Immortality of body. Christ submitted Himself to mortality for our sakes. He willingly died. John 10:17-18 *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. [18] No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*
- The glory that He had with the Father before the world was. Jesus Christ was not looking for glory. On the contrary, He dropped glory and honour for our sakes.
- He emptied Himself of His authority in heaven and in earth, which was given back to Him after the resurrection.
- His divine attributes and outward powers that He had with the Father from eternity. He had no power to do miracles until He received the Holy Spirit in all fullness. He could do nothing of Himself in all His earthly life.

He attributed all His works, doctrines, powers, etc. to the Father through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.[\[33\]](#)

Col. 1: 15-18 showed the true position of Christ before His “kenosis”. The One Who created all things and was before all things made Himself nothing and chose the most base of places to be born. Christ chose to be born in a manger and not in a palace. He chose a poor family to live with and not a wealthy home. This is a lesson to many ministers of the gospel who deliberately court the rich and influential in the society because of advantage.

The financial poverty of Joseph was manifested during the dedication of Christ in the temple. In the Old Testament, child dedication was to be done with a lamb. However, if the family was poor and unable to afford a lamb, two turtles or two young pigeons were accepted as substitutes. The pigeons were so common in Palestine, in those days; they could almost be gotten for free.

*Leviticus 12:8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.*

When the Creator of the heavens and the earth came to dwell with man, He chose a family that could not afford a lamb. As an infant, Jesus taught us not to despise the poor and the needy. All the status quo and class distinction that are fast becoming the norm in the church are abominations to the Almighty God.

*Luke 16:15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*

## THE EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

Only twice in the scriptures is it clearly stated that Christ left examples for us to follow. The first example is found in Jn. 13: 12-15

*So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? [13] Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

The first pattern that Christ specifically left for believers in general and spiritual leaders in particular, is the example of humility. Until one encounters godly humility in a leader in the church, the claim to spiritual leadership cannot be made.

The example of Christ is thought provoking in any age in which it is sincerely considered. For a leader to stoop down, physically and morally in the presence of his subordinates is demeaning. Even if a leader was forced to do that, it would be a terrible insult.

Here was the case of this unusual Leader, who gladly did the unthinkable for the purpose of teaching His followers in all the ages that leadership in His church must always stoop down for the followers. Therefore, until a leader “grows down” to this level, he cannot be considered a godly leader by heaven.

In Mark 10: 42-44, there was an interesting account recorded to teach disciples of Jesus spiritual leadership.

*But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. [43] But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: [44] And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. [45] For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

In this account, the Lord compared secular leadership with spiritual leadership. In the world, the leader is served. In the kingdom of Jesus, the leader is the one serving. In the world the leader is exalted, in the church, the followers are

exalted. And this service of the spiritual leaders must not be done with pretence or hypocrisy. It must be done out of a broken spirit that leaders are appointed in the church to reflect the nature of Jesus Christ.

From the account of the teaching in Mark 10: 42-44, the following points can be deduced:

- Leadership in the church is servant hood. Anyone who is not willing to be a house boy, or a house maid, should not go near leadership in the church, so that the office the person holds does not testify against him on the day of judgment. If a spiritual leader should mishandle authority in the church and behave like worldly leaders who demand respect and adulation from their followers, the Lord made it clear what will happen to that leader: *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; [49] And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; [50] The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, [51] And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Matthew 24:49-51
- The kingdom of Christ is not one of earthly pomp and splendour. All the paraphernalia of grandeur with which worldly leaders are decked must not be found in the church. It is unfortunate to observe some ministers of the gospel surround themselves with bodyguards and move in a convoy of vehicles like the great men of the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of Christ is for servants. Leadership in the church is for men and women who have “emptied” themselves of glory, honour and respect. It is for those who are not seeking glory but wish to be house maids. Whoever does not understand this is in serious trouble when the Lord shall return. As seen in Matt. 24: 51, the Lord “shall cut him asunder”.
- Greatness in the kingdom of Christ does not consist of place and position. Mark 10: 44 reveals God’s assessment of greatness. To the Most

High, the greatest person in any assembly is not the person whose Bible is being carried for him, or the person whose seat must be cleaned again before he sits down; the greatest person in the church is the person cleaning the seat, and the person carrying the Bible of the 'man of God'. *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.* If believers have a proper understanding of this fact, there would be less strife over positions and titles.

- In the kingdom of Christ, greatness is not determined by the number of servants one has, but by the number of people one serves. The world measures greatness by the number of people at the beck and call of an individual. God measures greatness by the number of people someone has put himself at their disposal as a servant. Therefore, when a minister of the gospel exults over the number of other ministers who report to him, such a one does not understand what constitutes greatness in the sight of God.
- In the sight of God, true greatness is not attained by reducing men to your service, but surrendering yourself in selfless service to them. Some “surrender” themselves to other men in service and publicly tell a crowd how they have put themselves in the service of other men. They already have their reward.[\[34\]](#)

God and man are looking for one man – a true leader. God seeks a man who can model leadership after the pattern of Christ. Unfortunately, when men start with humility, along the way, fame and honour seem to get into their heads and they forget the days of small beginning. God needs leaders who conform to his spiritual requirement of leadership.

Rather than adopt the Jesus Model of leadership, most Christian leaders seem to pattern leadership after the model of the world. There is sharp contrast between both models.

Therefore, God has reserved to Himself the prerogative of appointing true spiritual leaders. While man can bestow another man with titles and offices, only



God can bestow true spiritual position. The Lord makes this clear in Mark 10: 35-45.

*v. 40 - But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

Two principles are therefore attached to spiritual leadership.

- There is divine selection in spiritual leadership.
- Suffering is involved in spiritual leadership.

While secular leadership adopts the pyramid model of many people carrying a few on top, spiritual leadership utilizes the inverted pyramid model – few people serving the majority. Greatness only comes when one becomes everybody's slave and not when one seeks to subject everybody to servitude.

A very good personality to study in the scripture is Apostle Paul. As he grew in grace as well as in close walk with the Lord, Paul grew in humility and lowliness of mind.

- 25 years after his conversion, Paul says, “I am the least of the apostles” – 1 Cor. 15: 9
- 5 years after, that is, 30 years after having been in the ministry, he says, “I am less than the least of all the saints” Eph. 3: 8
- Still 1 year after that statement, he says “I am (not I was) the chief of sinners” 1 Tim. 1: 15[\[35\]](#)

The closer Paul walked with God, the more he was conscious of the corruption and wickedness of his own heart. He recognized that no good thing could be found in his flesh. Rom. 7: 18. Only a man who loathes himself will be able to fulfill the command in Phil. 2:3 to esteem others as better as himself.[\[36\]](#)

As the scriptures point out, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The easiest way to achieve spiritual promotion is through humility. There was the story of this international evangelist who was asked at a ministers' conference

the key to the fruitfulness in his ministry. This minister is very active in large crusades in Africa and he has been used by God to win a lot of souls into the church.

The evangelist paused for some time. Even though it was at a ministers' conference, he did not answer hastily. He took his time to consider the answer to the question. Finally, he looked at the man who asked him and said, "In all my years in the ministry, I have learnt that if any man will prostrate himself before God, God will lift him up before men".

Humility is a strong evidence of spiritual maturity.

## WHY DO CHRISTIANS FIND HUMILITY DIFFICULT?

Primarily, it is a problem which had been identified earlier as "Judaizing" of the New Testament church. Old Testament narratives are being presented to Christians as standards while Old Testament saints are being made role models for the church.

One of such problem area is Deut. 28:13 *And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:* It is clear that this passage clearly runs contrary to the commandment of the Lord and various New Testament commands on humility.

John 13:14-15 *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

Mark 10:43-45 *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: [44] And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. [45] For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Mark 9:35-37 *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. [36] And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, [37] Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

Ephes. 5:21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

Passages abound in the New Testament that teaches humility and lowliness of mind for the saints. However, believers are inundated with messages of being the head and not the tail. It got so bad that car stickers were made proclaiming: I WILL BE THE HEAD; NOT THE TAIL.

Not only that, prophets like Elijah who called down fire from heaven to destroy soldiers are also presented as role models to the church, and the decree of Elijah was sanctioned as the right way to pray. So, at the slightest provocation, Christians would start cursing and commanding their enemies to fall down and die. All these are done in utter disregard of specific New Testament commands to pray for your enemies and bless them that persecute you.

Matthew 5:43-44 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. [44] But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

Romans 12:19-21 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. [20] Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. [21] Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

THINK LIKE JESUS

The solution to developing Godly humility in the church lies in teaching

believers to think like Jesus. When the word of God enjoined believers thus, let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, God is saying in essence, “use your mind the way Jesus used His.” Think like Jesus.

If a man does not think like Jesus, he cannot speak like Jesus, he cannot live like Jesus, and neither can he handle situations like Jesus. Obviously, he can not be a Christian. The key assignment for ministers of the gospel is to encourage and groom believers to see situations the way the Lord sees them and to respond to such situations the way the Lord would have responded.

To achieve this, every believer must be trained to ask himself, in every situation, “how would the Lord handle this?” “If Jesus was confronted with this situation, what would He do?”

Once such attitude becomes the lifestyle of believers, humility and Christlikeness would be easily developed in the church. The Lord is looking for people that will show forth His character and His nature to the world. The entire creation itself is groaning in expectation for mature sons of God to manifest. There is no other alternative to Christlikeness in the church.

## 6<sup>th</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### ENDURING SUFFERINGS

*If thou art willing to suffer no adversity, how wilt thou be the friend of Christ? -*

Thomas à Kempis

The second example which the Lord left for the church to follow is enduring sufferings and afflictions.

1 Peter 2:21 *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:*

It is still a mystery of God that in accomplishing results on the earth, God chooses the rough road and equally difficult methods. Even though He has all power to make His workings on the earth easy, God seldom utilizes the easy way. As Hudson Taylor noted, "There are three stages in the work of God: Impossible; Difficult; Done." It is very easy to discern when God is working in a situation – it starts off humanly impossible.

Even to bring salvation to man, God chose the difficult path, the path that is antithetical to man's way of thinking and working. Hebrews 2:10 "*For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*"

God now commands that to be a partaker of the glory of Christ, one must first and foremost be a partaker of his sufferings. 2 Tim. 2:11-12 *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: [12] If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:*

The unwillingness of most believers to partake of the sufferings of the Lord is the primary reason why many people in the church avoid missions like plague. If they are convicted to the point of being unable to deny the call to make sacrifices for Christ, they would try to “settle” God by donating money to missions. Very few believers are willing to suffer for the sake of the Lord.

Yet, there is no other route to heaven but that of pains and sufferings. Paul told the disciples in Antioch, Acts 14:22 “... *we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*” Christ commands us to carry the cross daily which translates to: be prepared to suffer, be ready to be put to shame and possibly put to death for the sake of Christ on a daily basis. He told His disciples, *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: [14] Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* Matthew 7:13-14. Nobody will enter heaven by mistake or with a lukewarm and lackadaisical attitude. Whoever will reign with Christ will be someone determined to make heaven. Such a person would have “counted the cost” of following Christ and made up his mind to pay the price.

This lukewarm attitude in the church is very strange because in the world, when men join the army, they bid comfort and easy life goodbye. The soldier begins to live a regimented life of discipline and discomfort. Meanwhile, he has to take each day as it comes, not sure if he will survive the next battle. On the contrary, the soldiers of the Lord do not want to entertain any discomfort. They must be comfortable and God is expected to cater for all their indulgences.

The place of worship must be air-conditioned, the seats cushioned, the messages must be appealing to their tastes and expectations, the choir in splendid robes and entertaining them at every worship service, the cathedral modern and architecturally designed. If they are not satisfied in one place, they will move to another theatre. Unfortunately, there are so many pastors willing to cater for such indulgence so that the crowd can continue to visit them.

The call to Christianity is a call to carry the cross. As mentioned earlier, the cross stands for suffering, shame and death. Christ experienced all three and demands that whosoever shall reign with Him must also partake of the sufferings of the cross. A spiritually matured believer prepares his mind that suffering is an integral part of Christianity. When it comes, he does not seek to run away, but he quietly endures, trusting in the Lord to give him strength and grace to overcome.

1 Peter 4:1 *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;*

### 3 EXPERIENCES OF BELIEVERS

There are three negative experiences that believers encounter while still in the flesh:

- Temptations - Inducement to sin and do evil. Jas. 1: 13-15
- Persecution - Attacks received for bearing the name of Christ and defending righteousness Jn. 15: 20
- Trials - God's method for making us perfect Jas. 1: 2-5; 1 Pet. 4: 12

### TEMPTATIONS

Knowing that "*he that sinneth is of the devil*" Satan keeps bombarding the child of God with sinful thoughts and suggestions, hoping that the flesh would finish the job for him. Unfortunately, the successes that he has recorded in making believers commit sin encourage him to put pressure on each believer. The enemy believes that he can make any child of God return to sin.

This experience cannot be termed suffering for the child of God, as each believer is divinely equipped to overcome sin. As the scriptures make clear, *For sin shall*

*not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.* Romans 6:14

Therefore, if any child of God falls into sin, it is because he wants to commit the sin; not that the temptation was too strong for him to resist. *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* 1 Cor. 10:13 Even in the most pressure laden situation, God will still provide a way of escape for the believer to avoid and overcome the temptation. The option is now left for the believer to utilize God's solution or ignore it.

## PERSECUTION

Persecution is a manifestation of the hatred that Satan and the world system have for God and Christ, which are being meted out to the believers in Christ Jesus. Since Satan cannot get to God to vent his fury, he dishes it to the children of God.

A Christian that is not expecting persecution will find it difficult to follow Christ. The individual is merely a child of the world posing as a child of the kingdom of God. The Lord spoke in clear terms in John 15: 20 *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

If the Lord was persecuted, not one of His followers will escape persecution. How and when it will come is not known, but what is known, is that the Lord has sanctioned it for every disciple of His based on His own pattern of persecution.

The Lord reiterated this statement in Jn. 16: 33, *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

As mentioned in the section under the fruit of the Spirit, the peace of the Lord is



not the absence of problems and difficulties, but a calm and untroubled comportment in the midst of chaos. Only a matured Christian can be relied upon to handle persecution with Christian discipline and dignity without flying into a rage or struggling to defend himself and fight for his rights. Like Christ, he will commit himself to God to defend him and protect him.

## TRIALS

1 Peter 4:12-13 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: [13] But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

The working of the Holy Spirit in us has one objective, to make us conform into the image of Christ. To achieve this, God brings situations and experiences our way, sometimes using the devil, so that we can be purged of disobedience. For those who might wish to contest the claim that God permits Satan to attack His children for the purpose of purging and proving them, a reference might be made to Prov. 16: 4 - *The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* Let it not be forgotten, that in the case of Job, God determined the limit that Satan could go.

In addition, those who might still wish to be contentious should remember that it was the Holy Spirit Who led Jesus into the wilderness to meet the devil. Luke 4: 1-2 and it was the Lord who appointed “the thorn in the flesh” for Paul lest he *should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations ...* 2 Cor. 12:7

Most of our struggles and pains are caused by our resistance to permit the Holy Spirit have His way in us. We need to have a clear understanding of the objectives of God in our lives at any particular moment. The work of having faith was accomplished by Jesus on the cross, so having faith is quite easy for the believer. The present work is that of the Holy Spirit working obedience in us.

Faith gives us access into the Presence of God but it is obedience that enables us to abide and remain in His Presence. Therefore, Holy Spirit works in us and in our circumstances to transform us into the image of Christ. 2 Cor. 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Since the objective of God is to make us identical with Christ, the same method that was used to make Jesus perfect on the earth has to be used with us. Hebrews 5:8-9 *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; [9] And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*

The Lord did not bring obedience from heaven neither was He obedient unto death by virtue of being God in the flesh. (We should not forget that He emptied Himself of power as God the Son). The Lord learnt obedience by the sufferings that Holy Spirit took Him through. In achieving similar results with us, God takes us through the same path of sufferings leading to perfection.

Therefore, in every contrary situation, the perfect response should be to trust in God and wait on Him to finish His work in us. In addition, it would greatly help to ask the Holy Spirit, “What lesson are You teaching me through this experience?” No experience of man is wasted by God. Everything that comes our way has a purpose. Oftentimes, when we do not learn the lesson quickly and the experience is repeated.

There are people who have noticed that the same problems keep recurring in their lives. Such people should turn to the Holy Spirit and ask for revelation of the lesson that they are missing. Until they learn, the experiences will keep recurring.

It must be borne in mind that whenever God permits trials to come the way of His children, it is for their good. No matter how grievous the affliction may be, God permitted it for the good of the sufferer. Lament. 3:33 *For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.*

The God appointed role model for the church is Jesus Christ, and not Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David, Daniel, or any other figure in the Bible. Heb. 12: 2 says, *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* In looking up to Jesus, God points us straight to what He wants us to emulate in the Son – the endurance of the cross, suffering of the shame, before the ultimate glorification to the right hand of God. That is the pattern every Christian who desires to reign with Christ has to follow. There is no short cut; neither is there any other way.

No trial or chastisement is enjoyable, but the ultimate purpose is to purge us and make us partakers of the glory of Christ. Therefore, every matured child of God is prepared to go through difficulties so that he can be like Christ. This type of mind set will enable Christians to resist temptations and inducements to commit sin or to compromise Christian virtues. Anyone lacking this mindset will easily compromise and yield ground to the devil. Hebrews 12:8-11 *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. [9] Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? [10] For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. [11] Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

A matured Christian endures sufferings and afflictions.

## 7<sup>th</sup> SIGN OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

### **PASSION FOR UNITY OF THE CHURCH**

*The first joint priority of the churches of any city should be that of making it hard for people to go to hell from that city. - David Shibley*

There was the story of this man who visited the doctor for a medical check – up and returned on the third day for the result.

“I have two news for you”, said the doctor. “One is good, while the other is bad.”

“Well, tell me the good news first”, the man responded.

“You have 24 hours left to live”.

The man jerked straight up on the chair and exploded,

“Doctor, you cannot be serious. I have plans, things to tidy up; a lot of things are pending demanding my attention. What? 24 hours?”

“You have not heard the other news”, the doctor gently reminded him.

“What can be worse than what you have just said?” the man retorted.

“I was supposed to have told you yesterday!”

When a man knows that the end is at the door, he does not bother about the things of the world. If a man knows that he is going to die tomorrow, he does not concern himself with how much the latest brand of Mercedes Benz car costs, he is not concerned with the latest fashion, neither does he ask which stock is rising

or falling on the exchange market.

When a man is sure that he is going to die, what comes out of his mouth summarizes his lifetime. That is why people do not joke with the last words of a dying man. Whatever he says is implemented to the last letter.

The Lord was having the Last Supper with the disciples knowing that He would be crucified and killed the following day, so He had to summarize all that He had been teaching them for three years. He knew that they would be troubled and disoriented without His leadership, so He started to pray.

The entire John 17 was the prayer of the Lord before the crucifixion. First, He prayed for Himself, then He prayed for the disciples, and lastly He prayed for the global body of Christ. But as He prayed, one petition kept recurring. It was as if the most important thing to Christ in His ministry was this one request that He kept repeating before God. As a matter of fact, Christ made the request five times in one chapter.

*John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*

*John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

*John 17:22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*

*John 17:23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

It was not divine tautology; a needless repetition of an idea, statement, or word. The Lord was pouring out what was the greatest burden on His heart and His most fervent desire for His church. On His “deathbed”, so to say, He did not pray prosperity for His church neither did He ask for anointing and miracle working power for His ministers. He kept petitioning heaven for unity for all

Christians; that they may be one.

Therefore, a spiritually matured believer is fervent and passionate about the unity of the body of Christ. Such a one does not see denominations or church structures; he only sees the body of Christ. Such a person worships and relates freely to Christians irrespective of race, nationality, denomination, or social status symbol. Only one issue concerns the spiritually matured believer: “do you belong to Christ?” If the answer is yes, there is no more question like, “which denomination?” or “which parish?”

A lot of ministers of the gospel will encounter the wrath of God after they die, or when Christ returns, (whichever one comes first) for creating divisions in the church as a result denominational protection tendencies. A lot of evil have developed in the church as a result of dividing the body of Christ along denominational lines and much harm has been done to the cause of Christ. The progress of the church has been hindered because ministers of the gospel refuse to work together, pray together and fellowship together, due to denominational differences.

How can soldiers claiming to belong to the same army, serving the same kingdom, having the same King and fighting the same enemy, refuse to cooperate on the battle field? How can generals in the same army keep malice one with another and yet believe that they will win the battle and be victorious in the war? Will the king or the president who sent them into the battle be happy with them? Would he not dismiss them?

There is the story of two heads of large denominations who worked together in the same office before going into full time ministries. Their denominations evidently are amongst the largest in the country, yet they do nothing together. No program, no evangelism, no discipleship program, no prayer meeting; nothing. Each one stays in his own corner of the universe doing his own thing. As a matter of fact, a discerning observer would notice that they are competing. Yet, each one claims Jesus as Lord and Master, heaven as their home, and Satan as

their enemy.

It is a cause of concern for matured believers that even if they had a quarrel or disagreement, is not their Master named Prince of Peace? The Lord reconciled bitter enemies like Pontius Pilate and Herod Archelaus, could not the same Lord have reconciled their differences? And if they had no problem before, should not the mere fact that they are in the same family of God bring their ministries close?

When the issue of division rose in the early church, Paul immediately put his foot down to stop people dividing the church after the leadership. People were already politicking in the church by segregating the body of Christ after the lines of Paul, Cephas (Peter), and Apollos.

*1 Cor. 3:3-6 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? [4] For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? [5] Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? [6] I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*

Paul describes segregation in the church as carnality. No matter how spiritual a church leader may claim to be, no matter how sound he proclaims his denomination's doctrines to be, if he operates an invisible discriminatory fence, shielding his members from freely fellowshiping with other believers, such a leader is a carnal believer. All those who follow him are equally operating in carnality. There is no spirituality in their midst.

Today, believers do not march under the universal banner of Christ, but under the divisive and contentious denominational and racial banners that church leaders have created for their selfish ambitions and advantages. Like companies, each denomination advertises its unique advantages over the other denominations and promises benefits that the other ones do not offer.

There is a subtle and gradual shifting of focus of believers from Jesus Christ to the heads of denominations and anointed pastors. Most believers now extol the

virtue of their pastors and stress the advantages he has over the other ministers of the gospel. It is becoming a common practise now that when believers have problems, the first person they look for is the pastor rather than go straight to God. It is wrong and pastors should not encourage it; people should be encouraged and admonished to seek God first before they talk to any man. If they are well taught, they will know what to do when crisis comes. Paying too much attention to men is not scriptural. Paul also addressed this issue and warned Christians not to make too much of men.

1 Cor. 4:6 *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

In the midst of all these carnal wrangling in the church, it is not surprising therefore, that false religions are making progress in resisting the growth and expansion of Christianity since believers are not maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. The Lord already made it clear that a house divided cannot stand. All the false religions in the world are increasing in membership and in influence in the world, since the church that is the agent of God to eliminate them is not united in its assignment.

The unfortunate thing is that the disunity amongst believers is the exact opposite of the unity that is among the forces of darkness. The forces of evil are united to resist the church. It is only God, because all power belongs to Him that is limiting and restricting them.

## CHURCHES OR CULTS?

As grievous as it may sound, it is worth examining if some denominations and local assemblies are cultish in nature. Amongst other definitions, a cult is described as “a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious”. In our generation, it connotes an association or assembly that is evil and anti-God.



A good description of a cult is that of an organization that an individual is free to join, but he is not free to leave. Usually, whenever a member of a cult expresses the interest of leaving, the other members persuade him against it. If the fellow is adamant, they turn against him. Those who have been his friends before become his enemies, and in some instances, the enmity becomes so great that they attempt killing their former comrade.

Should such attitude be found in the church? The answer should be “no”, but in reality, it is “yes” in some denominations. Even though it has not degenerated to the level of killing the person leaving the assembly, the malice that usually develops is capable of producing spiritual death in the brethren. The usual charge is “so and so has left us”. From that instance, those who used to relate to him begin to ostracize him. Even those who still greet him will do so coldly. Why? The fellow is no longer fellowshiping in the former place.

To retain people at all costs, some ministers of the gospel insinuate that due to the promise of God to their ministry and the anointing that they possess, whoever leaves their denomination or local assembly cannot make progress in life. Some even go as far as claiming that their denomination is unique in the program of God in the end times.

Yet, if one searches the scriptures diligently, not one of these denominations is mentioned in the Bible. The word of God states clearly, Acts 15:18 *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*. Since God knew all His works from the beginning and He did not mention the name of any denomination in His Book, no current day revelation can make any assembly unique in the program of God.

Even if any particular minister is gifted by God, it should not be the basis of denominational pride or arrogance. Whatever gift any minister has is by grace. *For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* 1 Cor. 4:7

It should not be forgotten that Holy Spirit did not come to glorify any minister of the gospel or to project one denomination as being superior to the others. The Lord made the mission of the Holy Spirit clear in John 16:14 *He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.* The only work that the Holy Spirit is concerned with in the church is to glorify Jesus Christ. To achieve this, He uses anyone willing to surrender to His leadership. There is no unique denomination in the body of Christ. On the contrary, those that are special to the Holy Spirit are quietly serving God, daily facing hardships and risking their lives on the mission fields.

All these claims of special relationship with God and special position in the body of Christ are some of the factors fuelling divisions and disunity in the church. It ferments the spirit of competition instead of cooperation.

It is disheartening to observe some Christian assemblies operate like a cult. It is worse if a member should leave to start his ministry. The other members will treat him like a leper. Irrespective whether it was God who instructed him to leave, or he left because of problems in the particular assembly, he will be treated like a pariah. That is not a Christlike attitude. Such tendency is displayed by cults. It is a cult that a man is free to join but he is not free to leave.

In the church of Jesus Christ, it is an open door. As a matter of fact, if one leaves and changes his mind and decides to come back, the Spirit of Christ is waiting, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, to receive him back home. Not so, our present day Christian leaders. They will rather use it to buttress their claim that whosoever leaves them cannot succeed in life; that is why those who left are trying to return. It is not so written in the Bible.

Rick Joyner reported that in his ministry in the U.S., around July he releases the brethren to go on vacation. At the beginning of the vacation, he clearly tells them that if any of them does feel inclined to return after the vacation period, they are free to move to other ministries. His explanation is simple, the people do not belong to him they belong to the Lord and the Lord has the right to move His

people to wherever He chooses.

We have a situation right now in the body of Christ in which people are finding it difficult to proceed into their callings because they are afraid of leaving their denominations. Some Christian workers are merely expected to pass through some assemblies in their Christian walk and proceed to other places to serve the Lord. Right now, they are grounded and locked behind invisible denominational fences.

Some pastors have erected invisible walls around the members of their congregation and segregated the body of Christ to suit their personal ambition. Such pastors are the figs trees of this generation. They are full of leaves but have no fruit for the Master to eat. A matured leader does not see denominations; he sees the body of Christ.

## THE BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

On what platform is the unity of the church based. Is it on doctrines, on love for one another, or on the fear of God? The unity of the church is based on baptism. No, it is not the water baptism; but the baptism by one Spirit to form one body.

1 Cor. 12:13 *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

The Spirit of God dwells in me, in you, in every one who accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This Spirit dwells in each and every believer, yet the Spirit is one. It is the presence of the Spirit of God that makes us united in Christ. This is referred to in Eph. 4: 3 as “the unity of the Spirit”.

Ephes. 4:3 *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

The indwelling Presence of the Spirit is the basis for the unity of the church. The question should not be, “which denomination are you from?” or “which country are you from?” All those sentiments are immature questions that do nothing but

weaken the bond of oneness in the church. The only question that believers are permitted to ask one another is, “do you have the Spirit?” Whoever has the Spirit is a member of the body of Christ. Whoever does not have the Spirit is not a member of the church.

The only division that believers can have is that of location, not of denomination or doctrinal differences, or racial segregations. If you have the Spirit and I have the Spirit, then we belong to the same church. There is only one church; there are no two churches. Heaven recognizes only the body of Christ, made one by the Spirit of God.

So, to pray for unity in the church is not correct. Why pray for what you already have? We have unity; we are not looking for unity. Christ has by Himself made us one by the Holy Spirit. There is no where the scripture commands us to pray for the unity of the church. We are instructed to “keep the unity of the Spirit”. Eph. 4: 3.

It is like asking a rich man for a car, and he gives you one. Do you keep asking him for a car? No. You already have the car. However, the responsibility is on you to maintain the car. If you do not maintain the car, it will break down.

The responsibility of the church is to maintain the unity of the Spirit and not to keep praying for unity. Church unity cannot be achieved by human effort, it is too enormous. Our job is to maintain what God has already given us. To make the task easy for us, God tells us how to keep the unity, through “the bond of peace”. There should be no strife, no vainglory, no puffing up of ourselves on behalf of others. If we can maintain peace, we shall keep the unity of the Spirit.

All the denominational and doctrinal differences that we witness in the body of Christ are not of God. They are man made structures. After all, no denomination is mentioned in the Bible. God has in Christ, by the Spirit, made one body of Jew and Gentiles and man cannot break this unity. The most a man can do is to cut his own self off from the unity by not maintaining the bond of peace. We cannot break the unity of the church, but we can render it ineffective, one to another.

Believers should not seek unity of doctrines or unity of programs. We cannot agree on the same things, because our experiences differ. We cannot insist on anything else but what Christ has accomplished. “Do you have the Spirit of Christ?” If you do, you are my brother in the Lord. On the last day, God will not ask people to line up according to their denominations nor according to their doctrines; neither would he ask them to line up behind their pastors. The question in heaven would be, “do you have the Spirit of Christ?”

Romans 8:9 ... *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

You have the Spirit; you belong to Christ. We are one. We are in the same church.

You do not have the Spirit? Even if we fellowship in the same local assembly, we are not in the same church. It is the Spirit that separates the believers from the unbelievers, not denominations or fellowships.

Watchman Nee comments on this issue thus: “*We cannot insist on a unity of opinion. We cannot insist on a unity of experience. We cannot insist on any unity among believers except the unity of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and who has made Christ one in us. That is the unity which must always be among the children of God.*”[\[37\]](#)

A spiritually matured believer is passionate about the unity of the body of Christ.

There is no success without sacrifice. If you succeed without sacrifice it is because someone has suffered before you. If you sacrifice without success it is because someone will succeed after. --Rick Joyner

I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light-- John Keith Falconer

We talk of the Second Coming; half the world has never heard of the first. -- Oswald J. Smith

**"Whom God would use greatly He will hurt deeply."**

**- A.W. Tozer**

“If the church is to be missionary, she must be spiritual; and if the church is to be spiritual, she must be missionary.”

**- G. Campbell Morgan**

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