

Vol.5, No.1

# maranatha

"...our conversation is in heaven; from whence we look for the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ". Phil.3:20

## Christ Only

- The Saviour, Out of Sight
- Unholy Marriage
- Remember Lot's Wife

# content



page **3**  
**Editorial**  
Before The Master

page **5**  
**The Saviour, Out Of Sight**  
The Revelation Is Rare  
The Priest Exhibits Dullness  
The Enemies Of The Cross  
Whose God Is Their Belly  
Who Mind Earthly Things  
When God Is Blasphemed  
Every True Revival

page **10**  
**Remember Lot's Wife**

page **12**  
**Christ Only**  
Count Them 'all' But Loss  
The Expression 'Suffered Loss'  
That I May Win Christ

So this is who I am,  
a lost cause, a broken vase  
A chip off the old block,  
a descendant of a broken race

I'm less than I ought to be,  
that's how I know I need His  
grace

I'm nothing on my own,  
that's how I know I need to see  
His face

Actually this is one important part of the Gospel that majority of humans nowadays find very uncomfortable and very zealously resist. Several attempts have been made by ministers to remove such teachings from their ministry as though it's not part of the Christian Journey. My friend, do not be deceived, suffering is God's perfect will and plan for all His pilgrims.

How many of us women because of our worldliness and great influence at home have dragged our husbands and children into the path that leads to destruction. We become stubborn and rebellious so as to have our way to indulge in these activities and our husbands, for the sake of peace to reign allow us have our way.

You can actually start in the spirit and end in the flesh. If at the time you are meeting a brother who once walked in the spirit but now lives in the flesh, all you would receive from him are things of the flesh. Although he may preach with same vigor as when in the spirit, alas all that would overwhelm your heart are things of the flesh. You may be a Christian because you profess so but a man of the flesh indeed.

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**Tel** 08032297146, 08098439649

**Email** info@goforwardmissions.com

**Website** www.goforwardmissions.com

#### **Editorial Crew**

Charles Efiog, Ofem Otu, Inimfon Essiet, Joseph Ukam, Briggs P. Minanyo, Emmanuel Eyo-ita, Edna Ogan, Clinton David.

**Design** 1520 B.C. - 07063989451

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page **17**  
**Unholy Marriage**

The Rebuke  
The Remedy  
The Reward

page **21**  
**After Christ**

Is There Another After Christ?  
Jesus, Not A Means To An End  
Living By Faith

page **24**  
**A Brand Plucked Out Of The Fire**

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The greatest undoing of many is to work tirelessly at preserving their reputation amongst men. They prefer the commendation of men to God's approval. In fact they can go to any extent to win the approval of men rather than God's.

Why is it that the things in which the psalmist was praying to get rid of are the same things you are earnestly chasing and wishing to possess? Several times, vanity makes us feel empty and see the need to amass wealth and gather as much as we can, whereas the man who has his eyes fixed on the Lord only, is at rest.

We are instruments in the hands of God to bring illumination to the world around us, to frustrate the devil's schemes as weapons of warfare in the Master's hand and be agents of change in the world around us.



# editorial

by Bro. Charles Efiang

## BEFORE THE MASTER

Weak knees, broken heart, tears light up my eyes like candles, drained out, bleeding soul, hope from within begins to dwindle. The blade friends left in my back still hurts, razor sharp tongues, the words they spoke still cuts.

It leaves me in pieces, depressed, worn beyond repair, way past the point of no return, I'm gone beyond despair. Reaching out for help is like hoping for a chance to cope, I've ran out of rope, in reality I'm coping for the chance to hope.

Is this what rock bottom feels like? Cus all who meet me say, this don't just feel right and so I try to fight it but I end up losing, beaten black and blue, bruising. Now I fight to hide it, but the damage has been done, I can cover up my flesh wounds but my soul's cut runs deep, yeah Love is gone.

They say I'm psychologically challenged, maybe mentally deranged, some stop, stare, say, "hmmm that's strange."

I'm in over my head, way out of my range, some well-meaning folks be yelling stop & change.

Like that is what I need right now.

Do they think I'm the one beating myself back down?

There's a name for my condition, I'm broken there's no confusion, I need help, from someone who's been broken before and was still able to stage a resurrection.

So I'll seek Him in my brokenness, because of His openness despite His holiness.

I seek Him cus He doesn't turn back the lost, He takes them as they are, even the worst.

I seek Him cus He came for the wreck & the weak,

I've never really understood how strength was portrayed by turning the other cheek.

I seek Him so I'm not just broken like any other thing, but I'm broken before the Master and that changes everything.

Yes I'm broken before the Master like the box of alabaster, Oh! let my content spill, pour grace on my disaster.

I hope He hears the melodies hidden within my miseries, with my honest heart cries I'll anoint His feet, no trickeries, and have the world believe I'm something less, but Lord, You are different, You see beauty in my mess.

I'm broken before the Master, let strength be perfected in my weakness, health in my sickness, Lord rid me of my self-ish life, please let me be Your with-ness.

I'm broken before the master it's as if it keeps Him close, sometimes things have to be formless and void before His Spirit shows.

I'm broken before the Master, Lord I ain't perfect at all, the only reason I'll stand is cus I land on my knees when I fall.

No I'm not perfection, I may or may not be a masterpiece,

I'm broken in His presence, I'm longing for the Master's peace.

It's funny how "spiritual" folks can't sense that He is here, they tell me to get it together, can't have my emotions lying everywhere,

but I remember Hannah & her brokenness, how she poured out her heart & Eli thought it was drunkenness.

I believe we're too refined, all cacked up, we pile our weaknesses in our closets well

stacked up.

We try to project our own strengths, "Easy Worship"

cus kneeling & weeping before the Master is too hard so no one really does it, it's simpler to sweep it under the rug, lie about it, how bad can a few tricks be?

Well, I am broken & I'm not afraid to admit it, besides how else will He fix me

We're now graphic designers, everyone is PhotoShopping, Cropping the blemishes, as well as all that appear to be show stopping, to achieve this we follow a bunch of rules & stick to mere plans, but the image of God can't be constructed with bare hands

So this is who I am, a lost cause, a broken vase, a chip off the old block, a descendant of a broken race,

I'm less than I ought to be, that's how I know I need His grace.

I'm nothing on my own, that's how I know I need to see His face.

I ain't scared to say it, this is what I am right now,

a man with so much insecurities, I believe my life is literally upside-down,

But it wouldn't help to conceal it while I lift hands high,

and watch my lust consume me as I de form bad guy

I need Him to help me cus all I do is make it worse,

I'm a broken shell of a man, I need the life that He gave up for every one of us.

I'm broken before the Master cus that alone can really save me,

but even if it doesn't, I'm satisfied that the Master is near me.

I'll seek Him so I'm not just broken like any other thing,

but I'm broken before the Master and that changes everything. ■





# THE SAVIOUR, OUT OF SIGHT

By Bro. Ndoma Emmanuel

The Saviour, Out of Sight connotes the perilous manifestations amongst humanity described in 2 Timothy 3:1-8 which says;

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.*

“The Saviour” is an indispensable personality who cannot be substituted and has no replacement. For any man to claim he has any approved dealings with the Creator, he must have passed through “The Saviour” (JESUS). John 14:6 says;

*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

Friends, the scriptures cannot be broken, doing anything in this life without “The Saviour” is simply a waste of life (time, energy and resources). Consider also the words of Apostle Peter to the rulers of the people, elders of Israel and all the people of Israel in Acts 4:11-12

*This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

May I inform you, whoever you are, whatever

level you find yourself and wherever you are; your carelessness about “The Saviour” (JESUS) is the reason for the ugliness and unrest around you.

The Saviour, Out of Sight depicts a seemingly irreversible **Spiritual** and **Moral** decadence. It is a time characterized with prevalent falsehood and evil which has become a norm such that many who are ignorant would rather discredit and despise true Godliness and would trade/exchange that which makes for salvation and liberty for what enslaves and destroys. Maranatha.

Little wonder the Pharisees and scribe made themselves lords' over God's chosen people and would without fear twist and interpret God's laws to meet their selfish interest, no wonder their committed efforts in withstanding the compassionate ministry of our Saviour even influencing the people to prefer a murderer over the Saviour. See even the oppression and emotional trauma these Pharisees subject women to, such that a man could just rise up any time and divorce his wife and marry another woman or a man and a woman caught in adultery; the man is set free and the woman is put to death. Actually all these barbaric practices became obvious among the Jews during a period called the silent age which is the period between when Prophet Malachi was no more and when Prophet John the baptizer started to minister which was about 430 years of the entire earth not hearing a word from the LORD. The following scriptures by God's grace holds for us insights for our study:

*Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the Lord where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And*

*he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down. Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "What is the word that the Lord spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you." Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him." So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. 21 Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. - 1 Sam 3:1-19 (NKJV)*

Whereas these scriptures might be very familiar and interesting, I do not hope to discuss them exhaustively but for the purpose of our study, I'll like to draw out three issues from there as they are quite critical for our discussion:

When the revelation of God is rare, when the priest exhibits spiritual dullness and when God is blasphemed.

May I quickly note that, though, each of these items are being considered as individual sub-headings but nevertheless they are so interwoven such that the next item/sub-heading is a consequence of the previous and vice versa.

### WHEN THE REVELATION OF GOD IS RARE

*And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation* - 1 Sam 3:1

The Saviour, Out of Sight may first of all imply when the revelation of God is rare. This means scarcity of the expressions of the genuine/true nature/personality of God which may range from incorrect interpretations of the scriptures in its truths, lips confessions of the knowledge of God without commensurate lifestyle, charismatic profession of the spirit without the fruit of the Holy Spirit etc.

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

The personality of God is Love (charity)

1 John 4:7-8 says; *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

Love is the Saviour himself personified. Love is the true character of God. If we live in hatred, envy, discrimination and tribalism towards one another, blackmail and strife is usually the result and this is an evidence of a missing personality. I perceive this is the reason for the ruin in the Christendom. This is the cause of all the evil that goes on in the world (political, business, administration, nations etc). This is even the cause of all the conflicts in the homes/family and among friends etc.

The character of God is Joy (gladness, blessedness).

Rom 14:17 says; *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Joy is the product of finding God. It is solely the expression of a person whose sins has been forgiven. Joy is the result of true fellowship with God the Holy Ghost. It cannot be faked, that is what makes it different from happiness. Whereas happiness comes from the environment, circumstance, things etc but Joy is divine. It comes from God alone. Check

yourself, what is it that controls your emotions? Why are you in the mist of your many possessions still exhibiting dissatisfaction and sadness? Is it not the unseen weight/burden of sin that is the cause? Why not seek peace with God for that inner rest that brings fulfillment.

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.* - Psalm 32:1-2

The genuine nature of God is Peace (calmness, serenity),

Matt 5:9 says; *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

Heb 12:14 says; *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:*

Peace is God's true identity. When a man's way pleases the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. I also saw that two arch enemies (Pilate and Herod) became friends during Christ crucifixion. The fact is you cannot claim to have Christ and you live in hate/enmity towards people.

Longsuffering (Endurance, Patience, Perseverance) is God's character.

Heb 12:1-3 says; *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

And 2Tim 2:3 says; *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Actually this is one important part of the Gospel that majority of humans nowadays finds very uncomfortable and very zealously resist. Several attempts have been made by ministers to remove such teachings from their ministry as though it's not part of the Christian Journey. My friend, do not be deceived, suffering is God's perfect will and plan for all His pilgrims. Any Gospel that forbids suffering is a bastardized gospel and let that minister be accursed. Indeed many in attempt to skip this aspect of our pilgrimage have pierced themselves with many sorrows and guilt. The opposite of longsuffering is anxiety/desperation and is the human nature. Anxiety is the reason for most of the bloodshed and lootings in the society (anxiety for vengeance, riches and fame)

Gentleness (Kindness, harmless) is God's attribute.

Psa 18:35 *...and thy gentleness hath made me great.*

We can simply say; *'...thy relentlessness in helping me is what has wrought value in me.*

2Tim 2:24 says; *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men,*

Gentleness is the foremost impression that reveals the presence of the Saviour. Every human being is sensitive to kindness even the most arrogant of men. It looks to me like "gentleness" is a divine bait that grant you access into the hearts of men. My fellow pilgrims, David said, it is God's Gentleness that has made him great and if we hope to conquer even the vilest of offenders among men for God we must not do otherwise.

The genuine nature of God is Goodness.

Phil 4:8 says; *finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

Goodness describes a state of perfection. This describes a life that is actively striving and thriving in God's divine pleasantness.

Faith is God personified.

Hebrew 11:1, 6 says; *now faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Faith is simply absolute confidence in God. This can only be proved by the measure of our obedience to the word of God. And the measure of our obedience to God's word is a product of the condition of the hearts hence the scripture; where the treasure of a man is there his heart will be. May I ask you, where is your treasure? What you treasure most, automatically, captures your heart (thoughts, senses, emotions etc). And the things you are doing is a direct reflection of the content of your heart. Now, let us check; when sickness comes, where does your mind go? When lacks arise where does your mind first go? When rivalry arises who do you blame it on? Where you seek or hope to receive help in the time of your need reveals where you have placed God in your heart. Let me inform you, it is faithlessness to place more confidence in drugs over God's healing power; it is faithlessness to prefer money as a means to having your needs over God's power of providence; in fact, I hear God saying, I HAVE A CONTROVERSY WITH MY PEOPLE; THEY HAVE SUBSTITUTED GOLD AND PUT BRASS IN IT STEAD!

Jer 17:5 says; *thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.*

Maranatha.

God's nature is Meekness (Humility).

Matt 11:29 says; *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*



Phil 2:5-8 says; *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

Humility is the release of oneself for utilization not necessarily for any personal reward. Humility is the readiness to serve without profit. Humility is not the pious behaviors we have often acted. Indeed this virtue or attribute of God is been almost extinct. I have always wondered, why the exceeding increase and affinity for titles, recognition and honours both in the world and the Christendom. I think I now understand the force behind all the falsehood, boastings, arrogance and pride going on among men (males & females).

Another major attribute of God is Temperance (Self control).

Neh 9:17 says; *...but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.*

Prov 16:32(TLB) says; *It is better to be slow-tempered than famous; it is better to have self-control than to control an army.*

#### WHEN THE PRIEST EXHIBITS SPIRITUAL DULLNESS

*And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. "Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. the iniquity which he knows, and he did not restrain them. (Verse 8, 13).*

The Saviour out of sight may also depict a situation when the priest; they that are looked upon as God's representatives on the earth become dull of hearing God and begin to lose consciousness of the weight of their service (to please God and to reconcile men back to God). In this context, I will like us to view the priest as encompassing parent, church leaders and secular leaders at all levels. From our text we saw Eli's spiritual imperceptibility

*(And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy.)*

parental failure (...the iniquity which he knows, and he did not restrain them.), and lack of regard for God's judgment (*And he said, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."*) brought ruin to himself (...he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died:... 1 Sam 4:18), his family(...and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. 1 Sam 4:11), and the church/house of God(...And the ark of God was taken; 1 Sam 4:11) and the entire nation Israel(*And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great*

*slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.* 1 Sam 4:10).

This is the crux of the matter; if the ruin that occurred because of the failure of Eli the priest was not encompassing, I wouldn't have stretch the limit of my definition of a priest. The priest; as ministers of the Gospel or religious leaders (Pope / General overseer / Bishop / Apostle / Chief consecrator / Prophet / Evangelist / Rev. Prof. / Rev. Dr. / Rev. Pastor / Deacon / Deaconess / men's leaders / women's leaders / youth leaders / Sunday school teachers / prayer coordinators / missionaries etc.) are those who are generally accepted of the people to have had approval from God and it is often assumed that whatever these ones does is correct. But however, many of such instances has prove a quiet deception. Little wonder I saw Paul through the pages of the scriptures telling the Philippians brethren;

*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) Phil 3:17-19.*

Due to time and space, I want to address briefly three of the character of such deceitful men revealed by Paul;

1. they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:
2. whose God is their belly,
3. who mind earthly things.

#### THEY ARE THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

To Brother Paul Christ and the cross of Christ were the definition of life and everything. He said;

*For to me to live is Christ, - Phil 1:21*

*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. - 1 Cor 1:18*

*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. - 1 Cor 2:2*

*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. - 2 Cor 4:5*

Brother Paul saw nothing else in this present world apart from Christ and the cross of Christ. The words of a hymn read;

*O that old rugged cross, So despised by the world, Hold a wondrous attraction for me...*

Friends, I want to re-iterate without apology that the cross of my LORD JESUS CHRIST is the power and wisdom of GOD. Living as an enemy to the cross of CHRIST is to commit suicide. Unlike today, the early preachers made the cross of CHRIST the center of their message. They labored and bordered about

nothing else in their dispensation except JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified. Just like it is today, men require signs, miracles and manifestation in order to be persuaded.

The intellectuals seek after wisdom, philosophy, logical explanations and analytical exposition of scriptures. The early believers were resolute in their profession of the cross of CHRIST with much zeal as wholesome gospel. They did not yield to that cheap blackmail to proclaim the cross of CHRIST as a mere poetical tribute to CHRIST where we seem to simply pity HIM as did the daughters of Jerusalem. Neither did they carry about with them expensive ornamental designs of the cross as most religious people do.

Beloved, to live as enemy of the cross is to say I refuse to terminate my sinful natural life, to live as enemy of the cross is to refuse to rise to the life of the spirit, to live as enemy of the cross is to refuse to accept victory over the devil and the enemies of your destiny, to live as enemy of the cross is to reject to make CHRIST your central pursuit and encounter HIM as your ultimate achievement. It could be you are living in ignorance, may I inform you that ignorance is not an excuse, hence JESUS said; one who did not know his master's will and did things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with a few stripes. Know that the cross is GOD's wisdom for dealing with self, sin and Satan.

#### WHOSE GOD IS THEIR BELLY

This simply means selfishness or self centeredness. That is being very concern only for that which makes for personal benefit. It is to concentrate your attention, energy, labours and even prayers on things with the expectation of achieving rewards, and honour.

Our society today seems to be overwhelmed with people and leaders (religious and secular) having such characteristics. Such people always criticize and discredit others in order to project themselves. Even when they appear to be supportive, it is after they have seen something for their personal profit. Such people even as ministers of the Gospel sees and professes the gospel as a means to an end. They are surprisingly in constant competition with their counterparts both in ministry and in the secular society. They regard and teach prayers as a medium of collecting from God not as a worship/fellowship. They profess giving as a transaction instead of worship (i.e. give me N1,000 and God will give you N1,000,000), as exchange instead of offering and sacrifice (i.e. sow seed; for the salvation of your loved ones, to gain promotion, to pass exams, for successful marriage and family etc). It is the reason for all the gimmicks and false prophesies from the pulpits. It is the reason for the innumerable multiplication of churches in the society.

1 Cor 6:13 says; *Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them.*

Jesus said to the rich young ruler; *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*

Jesus said to the multitude; *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.*

Maranatha.

### WHO MIND EARTHLY THINGS

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Col 3:1-2*

*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. 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. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. 1John 2:15-17*

Friends instead of allowing our heavenly visions to be blurred by the charming attractions of the world and become hell bound why not we bow our hearts in sober reflection of the scriptures above and judge ourselves. Why don't we bow our heads right now in prayer to GOD in repentance and for sharp vision of our heavenly calling. To be lust for the flashy beauty of the earth is to hate GOD.

The primary role of a priest is to stop evil. As a priest in whatever capacity whether religious (minister of the gospel), secular (government official/tutors) or biological (parents/family relatives) your primary duty is to stop evil.

### WHEN GOD IS BLASPHEMED

*Because his sons are blaspheming God, Verse 13(TLB).*

*Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. - 1 Sam 2:22-24(KJV)*

The lack of the fear of the Lord and disrespect for Holiness has become quite evident especially among so called believers who attend Church. Our church services intended strictly for spiritual worship of the lord in spirit and in truth has become overwhelmed with entertainment. Entertainers and comedians now have space in our worship program to make jest of sacred things. People now come for fellowship with a different motive apart from seeking God's face in true worship. Men and women, boys and girls now

comes to fellowship for coupling and for seeking suitors. Even the ministers of the Gospel now plans, organize and get involve in programs with the aim of amassing wealth without passion for the salvation of the souls of the people. They dare to say; thus says the Lord, when the Lord has not spoken. They now make us to reverent and fear them rather than God. They seem to have succeeded to tune our focus away from THE SAVIOUR AND HIS CROSS to mundane and sensuality. My fellow pilgrims all of such activities, lustful desires, and self promotion doctrines etc that defies the true biblical instructions for worshipping God spells blasphemy.

To blaspheme means to speak or act disrespectfully. Eli's children; Hophni and Phinehas were levites by reason of their father's office. They had unreserved privilege to serve in the sanctuary together with their father. But they became carried away by their desire for the gratification of the flesh and began to be greedy with the Holy offerings meant for the Lord's service. They used their position to defile the women that served in the temple. The bible reports "*because his sons are blaspheming God,*" how do their blaspheming God apply to me, you may want to ask; I don't touch church gifts and offerings, I don't womanize, etc. excuse me, Eli in vs 24 of chapter 2 of 1Sam said;

*Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress.*

It is no good report when your life as a Christian is not characterized by a sharp distinction from an unbeliever, it is no good report that as a Christian your gospel of Christ cannot strike a cord in the heart of a guilty sinner, it is no good report as a Christian that your life is not a source of inspiration to others, it is no good report that as a Christian that people even believers have something against you.

My dear brethren, you calling yourself a Christian and living a faithless life is the highest blasphemy. i.e Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Are you not making the Lord's people to transgress when you profess Christ and live not after the manner of Christ? Are you not making the Lord's people to transgress when as a brother you borrow from a brother and don't border to pay back? Are you not making the Lord's people to transgress when as a minister or a brother you make yourself a burden on the lord's people? When as a Christian you give people cause to backbite you, you have caused them to transgress.

Another outstanding matter in the report about Eli's children states; *and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.* They used their privileges to defile women in the church. They caused the women to live in perpetual guilt toward God. They caused these people spiritual retardation. They were responsible for the church's spiritual stagnation. Little wonder the utter ruin of Eli's carrier and isreal,

indeed the repercussion of such activity is usually colossal damage. Little wonder the sternness of Paul's instruction on such issues;

*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. - 1 Cor 5:9-11KJV*

It looks to me that Eli did not comprehend the gravity of the evil his sons were causing that's why instead of stopping them, he was rather advising them. I now understand why God was so wrathful and did not spare him. Hmm, inspite of Paul's warning, the same error still goes on among many brethren, fellowships and churches. No wonder, despite all the prayers for revival, there is the growing coldness among the congregations and is as if God is saying go and practically stop the immorality that goes on there.

The truth is the evil/sin we cannot stop (*i.e. put an end to, or prevent from developing*) in our individual lives, family and congregations/fellowships constitutes blasphemy of God. And such dilemma confirms the fact that the Saviour is out of sight. Notwithstanding, these are the words from The Saviour;

*Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Rev 22:7,11-13 (KJV).*

Maranatha.

### THE PERIOD THAT PRECEDES EVERY TRUE REVIVAL

Considering where we read in Isaiah 32:15-20, we will realise that there was a transformation that took place in the badland deserts and wilderness before they became a fruitful field. It is dangerous to assume that this transformation took place overnight. It would mean omitting a very crucial process that ushers in every true and lasting revival. In fact, a careful consideration of every true revival in the Scriptures and in contemporary times reveals this indispensable process.

Now, when a farmer procures a land whether a wilderness or a desert for farming, there is a labour he has to carry out if the land must be transformed into a fruitful field. These are some of the things that he does and nobody praises him for them because they are hidden away from their sight. The first thing that is paramount in the heart of this farmer is how he



is going to clear the land of every weed and other things that will impede the growth of whatever he will be cultivating on the land. This is what the Scriptures call the removal of the dross and the breaking of the fallow ground. (Pro 25:4; Hos 10:12) Your life cannot be filled with the weeds of sinfulness, compromise and the flesh and you are expecting God to send you the early and the latter rain. Uhn-uhn, it cannot happen because it will only end up propagating the weeds instead of the correct seeds and ultimately, the correct seeds will be choked up by these weeds. How I pray that you will settle down and allow the Silversmith to take away the dross from your life that a vessel may come forth for Him.

That is the first stage in the cultivation process. The other stages include the ploughing and planting of viable, incorruptible seed (of God's word), to be followed by pruning/purging and watering in order to achieve the full potential of fruitfulness. It is after this farmer has played his part that he can now be expecting an early and a latter rain (Joel 2:23). The latter rain which we are crying desperately for is going to herald a great harvest of souls and the second coming of the Lord Jesus. But before this happens, there is a cultivation process which must take place in our lives. Even after the rain has descended, there is still a continuous pruning process that is aimed at increasing your fruitfulness. In preparation for the revival in the early church at Pentecost, the disciples had to be called by Jesus first (Matt 4:19), after which He laboured over their lives in a consistent manner in discipleship over three and half years. Then He now instructed them to tarry in the city of Jerusalem in prayer and thanksgiving until they are endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:13, 14). If we also must experience such a mighty outburst in our generation, there is a tarrying which we must do and the time to do it is now.

Charles Grandison Finney was born again on the morning of October 10, 1821 and was filled with the Holy Spirit in the evening of the same day. He said, "I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; sometimes, I would literally pray without ceasing; I found I couldn't live without enjoying God's presence." It was said of the Moravian revival that there were years of daily preparations in prayers and of their own lives that preceded such a mighty outpouring that impacted several lives even 100 years after the visitation. It was also said of Samson in his revived state, "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan." (Judges 13:25)

This revival God wants to send and that which we have been crying for must not meet your heart unprepared in sin, backsliding, still given to the works of the flesh and compromise. All these will only produce strange fire from the altar of your heart to God and it will definitely consume you and your generation. May our vessels be found prepared for the imminent mighty outpouring of God in Jesus' name.

#### EXCERPTS FROM THE INDELIBLE IMPACTS THAT CHARACTERIZED EVERY TRUE REVIVAL

*And when the day of Pentecost (the beginning of revival) was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place...*

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit*

*gave them utterance.* - Acts 2:1,4

The coming revival will be heralded by the mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost who will come to fill (satisfy) all the vessels that have been waiting in preparation for Him and there are going to be glorious indelible impacts that will accompany it. Please note that the Holy Ghost from heaven had a particular address where some thirsty souls are tarrying for Him to come and fill them.

*"Then they that gladly received his word were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." - Acts 2:41-47*

*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

*And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*

*Neither was there any amongst them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. - Acts 4: 31-35*

We can go on and on considering such glorious eternal impacts made on the lives of men by the genuine revival which took place in their own time. Of note is the revival that took place during Ezra's time that brought about a massive genuine repentance by the children of Israel who had intermarried with the heathen. We actually need such type of revival, because the present day church is in an unholy romance with the world and its system. In fact we have tried to keep the machinery of the church working without the Holy Ghost's power. Several churches can go on for several Sundays in a year without an addition of a saved soul to their congregation. Such things have to stop as we cry together to God for a mighty visitation upon our individual lives.

Of note in our contemporary times is the revival that took place during C.G Finney's time. It was said that at least 600,000 converts were made with eighty five percent of those converts remaining true to the Lord. It was said of Finney that "the most ordinary statements would cut men off their seats like a sword, would take away their strength and render them almost helpless as dead men. We need such revival even now in our generation.

Cornwall is a village in England where after a hundred years that John Wesley had passed there;

a British noble passed through it and could not get a glass of liquor to satisfy his lust just because a revival took place there 100 years before. Pour afresh on us such tremendous baptism of the Holy Ghost that will impact our generation and change the landscape of our land forever.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was what was regarded as the Korean Pentecost. Everywhere, revived Churches began to see "drunkards, gamblers, adulterers, murderers, thieves, self righteous, confucianists and others" transformed into new creations in Christ. The Korean Pentecost was characterised by the unity and cooperation which prevailed amongst the Christians, the remarkable numerical growth of the churches, the wonderful religious awakening of 1907 which affected 50,000 converts, the noteworthy interest in the word of God, the dedication of national Christians to service including generous giving, and the wonderful prayer life of the Korean church. The Korean revival was born out of intense prayer and prayer remained an integral part of the Korean church life throughout the twentieth century.

#### CONCLUSION

The present situation of things in our churches where we have just a special one week programme tagged a 'week of revival' will not bring us the much needed revival. There is a deliberate price to pay if we must experience the prize of a genuine revival. There is a tarrying which must be employed in order to receive this revival fire. Revival will only come to men who are willing to give it all it takes irrespective of how costly it is. Remember that the revival in the early church was to a particular address where some people who had paid the price for it were gathered together.

C.G Finney as a young Christian often had such precious seasons of communion with God that he said, it could not be described in words. He had frequent days of fasting and intense prayer, which characterized his ministry throughout his lifetime. At times, he was burdened so deeply for others that he literally groaned deeply and loudly. Often great burden came upon the new converts. Sometimes they prayed whole night until they were physically exhausted with the burden for the salvation of the unsaved. Prayer meetings multiplied resulting in many being brought to the Lord.

We need men of this spiritual caliber in our generation. Men who will agree together and say we will not rest until the Spirit be poured on us and our generation from on high in a mighty way. Men who will not mind the number of days which they are to tarry until they are endued with power from on high.

Our generation will continue to waste away until there will arise vessels of mercy like Finney, Wesley, Paul, Peter, Ezra, Elijah etc who will be responsible enough to hold unto God for the fulfillment of His word to our generation.

John Knox a great man of God prayed like this, "God give me Scotland or I die!" Again John Hyde who was a missionary prayed, "God give me souls or I die!" Again George Whitefield prayed and said that "God give me souls or take my soul!" May we begin to also pray in our generation that God give me revival or I die. May God send us such a mighty outpouring in this end time that will herald the 2nd coming of our Lord Jesus.

Let us pray. ■



# REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

By Sis. Iberedem David

“Remember Lot's wife!” Jesus warned his disciples as he spoke to them about the second coming of the Lord. This matter was very important to our Lord that he had to take us down memory lane to remember a character whom the bible tells of how she got it wrong along the way and missed out for eternity. He thus said this as a warning, lest any man should fall prey to the same, making the mistake Lot's wife did. He seemed to be saying, “take heed unto yourselves that you do not end up like her”.

This account is rendered in Luke 17:28-32; *“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife.”*

Jesus, in talking with his disciples was comparing times; times that had been and times that were to come, an event that had occurred and one that was yet to but would surely occur. In this, he brought to the fore, a character whose action stands to be a great lesson for pilgrims in this journey who intend to run and finish strong. She too, like all pilgrims started out strong, running away from the judgment that was to befall the sinners but Alas! Her race was cut short by her actions and she never made it.

Looking at Genesis 19:15-26;

This shows us how God in his mercy had saved Lot and his family from the coming judgment. He was coming with wrath to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil deeds, to put an end to their evil, their abominable way of life. Lot had lived as a righteous man in their midst and God wasn't going to let him perish like the rest. He thus sent his angels to rescue them and they did. They were given specific instructions to flee and never look

back, permission to lodge in a nearby city for safety and they began to run but then, Lot's wife looked back and got instant judgment—turned into a pillar of salt.

She had begun running, running for her life, running to safety, running towards God's refuge and away from judgment, from the destruction but as she ran, it was as though the initial terror she felt, the initial thoughts for safety began to wane and she slowly began to have some realization, it began to dawn on her, she was losing it all... Though she was still running, her heart wasn't with her, it had stayed back at Sodom. It was only a matter of time for her body to also turn back. As she ran, she began to reason if this could actually be true. Could it be that all those pleasures, friends, business ventures, money, mansions, sights, sounds, clothes, cars, fame and fun would just go like that? In a twinkling of an eye? Was she to just lose them all like that and move on as if nothing had happened? How could she be expected to sever her heart from all that in just a moment and move on? In her heart, she still held onto them, refusing to let go, refusing to accept, pondering over and over again and in a bid to convince herself or to console herself that probably there was a small remnant she could hold unto to, she wanted to know if indeed, everything will be destroyed as it was said, she thus turned aside.

For some believers, we seem to be running the race but our heart is in the world. To the people around us we are running, to the Christian folks you belong to the fold, yet in your heart, you know it's merely a form, of a truth you belong to the world. You have derailed in your heart and you are now pre-occupied with the perishing things of clay. The place of God and his word has been taken over by other things. We have substituted the pursuit of God for the pursuit of the world, the love of God for the love of money, holiness for sinful living, chastity for immorality, kindness for extortion, meekness for anger, gentleness for rage. With all these in our heart, weighing us down daily, how then can we run? We must lay aside every weight and accept the yoke of Jesus alone.

He said in Matt 11:28-30; *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

His yoke is very light, we can run with it. It is never burdensome. Why not hand over every other thing to him that you may be light enough to run.

The bible tells us in Matt 6:33; *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* It is his kingdom and its righteousness that we are called to seek, taking no thought for our life; what we shall eat, drink, and put on our body: that is God's burden.

Lot's wife had put all of her life's investment in Sodom, she had integrated into its life and customs. She had been swayed by the dazzling sights, the tempting sounds, the trend in cars, fashion, furniture, house, beauty, marrying, even raising children. She had long forgotten the ways of the Lord. She looked past the sinful nature of the people and got entangled therein. She must have put pressure on her husband to remain there even if he wanted to leave.

The bible tells us in 2 Peter 2:8; *“For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;”*

Lot was vexed daily by their lifestyle, yet his wife loved it more and more and remained therein. We see that even when the angel told them to go to the mountain, Lot opted for a nearby city. He had already known of this city and would perhaps had left for it since but his wife would hear none of it. How many of us women because of our worldliness and great influence at home have dragged our husbands and children into the path that leads to destruction. We become stubborn and rebellious so as to have our way to indulge in these activities and our husbands, for the sake of peace to reign allow us have our way. We slowly, subtly and enticingly drag him into the



very web that has caught us. We encourage him to stay away from church and rather attend social functions. We encourage him to invest a lot in business, cars, clothes, latest gadgets just to keep up the facade but we discourage him when he wants to give to the work of the Lord. We grumble and bear grudge when he wants to help the brethren, seeking rather to use the money for our upkeep. We encourage him to keep company with the worldly men, and surround himself with them as associates, forsaking the company of the brethren. Remember Lot's wife! Remember her end and change your ways.

Lot's wife dragged her daughters in her worldliness, such that they were betrothed to marry men from Sodom. You may think there were no Christian men around thus this betrothal. Remember Abraham when he wanted to find a wife for his son Isaac; his servant had to travel to another land where he was sure he could at least get a God fearing lady, a likeminded person. Pleasing God wasn't her priority; she would rather do that which would be prestigious. She had probably linked them with children of the rich and famous, her fellow friends. These son-in-laws to be knew nothing of the Lord or his ways and they rather corrupted Lot's daughters. They had no regard for elders, more so their father-in-law. When Lot went to them to warn them of the coming judgment, they paid no attention to him.

We see this in Gen 19:14; *"and Lot went out,*

*and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law."*

This is unlike the daughter-in-laws of Noah who heeded to their father-in-law and entered the ark. These women, though living in a sinful generation were clearly influenced by the righteousness of Noah. Also Ruth the Moabitess, though offered an opportunity to return to her people, declined. She chose rather to remain with Naomi who had been a godly influence to her. Such was not the case however with Lot's sons-in-law. They saw his wife and daughters as one of them, no positive influence for the kingdom from these ones. Rather, they influenced Lot's daughters negatively, teaching them the ways of Sodom. This influence was to be seen later when they made their father drunk and slept with him on consecutive days. This they did claiming to be preserving a seed for their father. We know how this seed (Moab and Benammi [Ammon]) became a thorn of flesh in the sides of the Israelites. Beloved, are you presently towing the path of Lot's wife and leading your children astray through your worldliness. Have you permitted laxity and not stood firm on biblical standards in raising our children all in the name of allowing them to exercise their freedom/right. Remember Lot's wife!!

Sisters, there is so much worldliness around us; be careful that ye be not entangled. Set your eyes on things above which is eternal and

not on the temporal. Seek not for the applaud and acceptance of Men according to a world standard where you are required to dress a certain way, use a certain bag, shoe, look a certain way, behave, talk, walk a certain way, making you to buy and accumulate unnecessary possession that will fade someday. Stand rather, on the biblical standards and principles for everything. Our example is always Christ alone. This is not saying that you should look tattered, haggard or unkempt, no! As the bible puts it in 1 Pet 3:3-4, it all boils down to the hidden man of the heart. What is your heart disposition?

It is sad to note that she had even escaped and was running but never made it to the end. Jesus said "no man having put his hands on the plough and looketh back is fit." You have received Christ as your saviour and you have started the heavenly race, stop looking back! Stop retreating your step! Stop hungering for the cucumbers of Egypt! Let all else be counted as nothing and your ultimate pursuit be to finish strong.

Paul said in Acts 20:24a; *"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy..."* I wish you could also say that.

Remember Lot's wife and run dearly for your life, not looking back. Nothing is lost to him that has decided to follow Christ wholeheartedly, but all will be lost to him that looketh back after putting his hands on the plough. ■

# A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE FIRE

(Continues from page 24)

in the scripture), to a lamp, a torch, or a burning/flaming arrow. (Judges 15:4; Pro26:18; Isa7:4; Amos4:11). It was what Samson fixed between the tails of the foxes when he tied them tail to tail in Judges 15:4. In ancient times, burning/flaming arrows were important weapons of war. Typically, they were launched in large numbers, shot out as missiles by skilled marksmen or by tanks like cannonballs and even from a distance were effective in razing down the enemies camp in flames. Lamps and torches were also used to illuminate; usually one person holding the torch could brighten the entire court by

igniting certain receptacles which had in them wood chippings or saw dust and were placed along the paths or by the doors.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, A firebrand is a torch or burning stick with a flame at one end. It also describes a revolutionary; one who agitates against the current situation, changing and overthrowing a standing/pre-existing mindset.

So we are FIREBRANDS:

1. As Torches and Lamps: Igniting and Illuminating. (Matt 5:14-16; Luke11:33; John 5:35)

2. As Burning/Flaming Arrows: Destroying the enemy's territory. (Judges15:4-5; 1John3:8)

3. As Revolutionaries: Challenging the status-quo, changing what is to what should be (John 1:23; Acts17:6; Heb 11:32-38).

We are instruments in the hands of God to bring illumination to the world around us, to frustrate the devil's schemes as weapons of warfare in the Master's hand and be agents of change in the world around us. (See Scripture references above). There's an army rising up! Are you in the army? Let us pray! ■



# CHRIST ONLY

By Bro. Clinton David

*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ - Phil 3: 7-8*

The matter before us today is one that has stood as a pinnacle in my heart in the few years of my searching and I felt compelled by the Spirit to share it with you. Although present day inquirers of the holy faith would consider this subject unpopular and lacking modern truth, nonetheless the foundations of Christ remain unshakable, hence I shall by the Spirit expound to you the indisputability and utmost essentially of running as so acclaimed by scriptures if by any means worthy you would win.

I shall discuss this subject under the following sub-titles;

1. Count them 'All' but loss
2. What is implied by the expression 'suffered loss'
3. That I may Win Christ

## COUNT THEM 'ALL' BUT LOSS

*...but what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. It is seen without doubt that all that he counted were actually gain and profitable to him. He had before meeting Christ made much profit from such he counted. This confirms to me that he had lived pleurably and happy with those things he counted. There was none of such that had brought him pain or sorrow. Most of the times men want to do away with things that bring them sorrow. Some want to quit a job not providing much gain, some would resign from appointments not allowing them peace of mind, and some from relationships troubling their happiness. Here we see that all he had taken stock of ere he met Christ were gainful to him. He truly had profited in them. If to consider joy and happiness as a confirmation of God's approval, such he should rather cling to without a thought. He should rather be seen aiming higher in these that had given him peace and joy, and were gain to him. He should settle down here and seek more ideas from God to consolidate further. The natural*

tendency of men is to migrate towards a comfort zone. So most times you would see yourself pressing to areas that would offer you joy and solace. You would think 'gain' is God's approval. Most people generally assume that when one is doing well from earthly standards, then God is with him. They think anything that gives you gain has God's approval, not minding the present state of the man in question. So you would rather bring a tithe from a business rather than consider a quit if an encounter with Christ adjudges so. Sometime ago, a Pentecostal church had invited a cult leader to chair an occasion of a fund-raising. The invitation I suppose was for the gains such has made. When a man meets Jesus carrying the gains he made afore, the matter becomes an issue of contemplation. Some of you would say lets hold the two together. Some would assume such gains to be the gains of following Christ, and would hold to their old ways. Some of such gains could be the fruits of an erroneous way but now considered as miracles from an old life. Once, a young man got bornagain who had enjoyed much spoils from darkness. After some months he also brought his former girl friend, who now professes same way of salvation. Not long from then, they asked for a blessing of marriage. The pastors went on to join them and being privy to it I warned against such a union. After some months into their marriage they finally withdrew from church and continued in their former ways. The supposed girl friend was one of the gains that brother made before meeting Christ, and for its profitability he could not relinquish. To him, this gain of his must accompany him on his new journey with Christ. Some could even threaten the Pastor saying; if I cannot be allowed to keep this gain of mine, then needless going with you to church. Once another new convert told the Brethren, I have consented to the ways of Christ which you preached and now bornagain but please I cannot stop smoking immediately, so the Brethren advised that he could wean himself slowly as long as he does not stop attending church. I have truly not seen any scripture of such, and not with the Apostles. It was not long that same man also withdrew forever from Church. There are many gains of such. Some do continue their enjoyment of such gains though they had met Christ. The job you have now may have been gotten from engagement in some sorts of promiscuity or compromise, and now that you met Christ, you

would you rather hold to that gain while yet following Him. The matter is what gains did you make ere you met Christ? What is it that holds sway before your heart right now? Let's however look at the scriptures again before we confront ourselves with these queries.

*...what things were gain to me?*

The issues 'of gain' were actually of gain and beneficial to Brother Paul. He had profited from them all. He had become rich and influential from these things. Most of you always look for profit. Some go to church because they needed to make some profit. Some follow Jesus for what they would profit in the world. Here Paul too had made much profit from these things he counted before he even met Jesus. If he had come to Christ for extra profit, it would not be necessary because he had much gain already. However, the issues of sort were gain to him alone and not to Christ. He had pursued things that were gain to him. He had pursued things of self aggrandizement. He had only worked for things that profited his flesh. The issues were only profitable to his flesh- of fame and relevance in society. Such things made him tall amongst mates. He had access to great men of authority and would parade the streets with his pharisaical dominance. He was of the status of such men to reckon with in society. He had command of other men, a boss of men indeed. He had much gain in the flesh. He is a man of the flesh before he met Jesus' face. Sometimes I wonder why a brother who has had a genuine encounter with Christ now ends his race in the flesh, becoming that man of the flesh which Paul was ere he met Jesus. It is for this seeming deceit that you see present days believers pressing for fleshly gain rather than Christ, not minding if that figure-head of theirs who they are imitating has ended the race in the flesh. You can actually start in the spirit and end in the flesh. If at the time you are meeting a brother who once walked in the spirit but now lives in the flesh, all you would receive from him are things of the flesh. Although he may preach with same vigor as when in the spirit, alas all that would overwhelm your heart are things of the flesh. You may be a Christian because you profess so but a man of the flesh indeed.

He truly had gained affluence and influence from all he counted. Stumbling again on the



scriptures where Paul needed to consecrate himself according to Jewish custom, and he was just picked up by the mob while in the temple worshipping. This same Paul was few years ago spokesman and defender of the way his attackers professed, but now an outcast to them, I realized that he indeed had lost something. He had lost that initial influence and gain. Sometimes when a traditional leader comes to Christ, he is advised to maintain the royal seat and administer ungodly rituals to others which he probably would not maybe touch with his fingers. He needed to protect his seat, and not to surrender it. You may think in keeping that seat you would win the others, how? Why are you afraid to lose that position? Some are saying; give me Christ but leave me in my present preoccupation, do not take away my present position and location. I knew a brother many years ago who came under strong conviction of sin and got genuinely saved. He would cry and roll from one point to another while praying. He was so overwhelmed, he rushed home to bring tidings to his house, and his parents also got saved. He would never miss the morning retreats. After a while his former girl friend also followed him to the meetings, he said she is now born again. Now truly, the singular attachment to Christ would sever that old ties of theirs, but they yet cling to each other. He could not let away that gain he made while in the flesh, and it was not long he also was lost. Now some who pretend to be present physically had actually lost their heart while keeping those gains. Both cannot go together. If you are used to insulting government and leaders before you met Christ, and had probably gained fame by this, you would not continue this path after you meet Jesus. If you had gained popularity through fashion and beauty fair before you met Jesus, there is a trade you must surrender. Any man who says otherwise speaks not the Lord's voice. If you had built houses and industries through stolen funds, then there are gains you must count to lose if you would see Jesus. If you have risen to hold the topmost position in your cultural or traditional fanfare before you met Christ, then you truly must let it go. There is no alternative to this hence it would be easier for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for you to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

...those I counted loss for Christ...

If you look keenly and sternly at the above words, it looks to me as a precondition before Christ is gained. It seems to me now that you must lose your gains to gain your loss. If Christ who was afore lost in your heart must be gained, then you must lose your gains. He truly counted them as loss. Sometimes I hear believers say to another; do you know who I am, how can I Professor, Bishop or Doctor –so and –so accept this. The truth is you must also lose your credentials and honour for Christ, which is a precondition if you must see Jesus. Let's see a scripture as we probe further;

...Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. - Luke 18: 22 - 23

The young man above described has gotten so

much gain in the flesh and this became a stumbling block to seeing Jesus. Even though he had passed the moral test in life and was a man of good standing before men, his gains in the flesh-worldly riches became the obstacle. He considered this precondition of little importance as to following the Lord. It is true that he needed heavenly treasures but his earthly treasures were innumerable, and so he could not do away with so much gain at a glance. Most probably he would consent to let them off gradually, but the matter for response is most urgent and needed a swift decision. He was meant to count them all, but loss. I have come to know that if you cannot follow the Lord now, it could be difficult in the future for then your gains might be superfluous. The precondition for this young man was for him to count his riches dung and loss. The thought of losing that amiable position and fame which he gained by much struggle; and sometimes after much ungodly exercises left him sorrowful. He could not imagine letting off gains of many years, and profits that other men are dying for just because he needed Jesus. The gaining of the Saviour was indeed a good idea but not as to equal these gains that has brought him to fame and affluence. I suppose he would have been content to take both along, but lo it was not to be so. This is where most professed followers of Jesus have missed it. You have thought both can go along. It is also unfortunate that some by such gains were given the highest seats in churches, so that any fresh comer or convert while in worship silently lust in his heart for these rather than Christ. You would hear them pray and shout, but just go closer to the heart, all the seriousness and dedication is for nothing but materialities. I wonder what could have gone through the heart of those bystanders as that young rich man walked away from Jesus. Oh how we just lost a- would-be great financier of the ministry! He indeed missed the Saviour! How many times have you missed the Saviour?

Let us go a little further by looking at these scriptures;

*And Jesus called to Him the throng with His disciples and said to them, if anyone intends to come after me, let him deny himself (forget, ignore, disown, and lose sight of himself and his own interests) and take up his cross, and (joining me as a disciple and siding with my party) follow with me (continually, cleaving steadfastly to me). - Mk 8:34 AMP*

If a man would disown and lose even his very self in order to follow the Lord, then the issue of counting your gains loss is nothing to be contended against. It goes to elaborate the relevance it is to see Jesus. Nothing even yourself must contend this position. You must disown even your very self if you must see Jesus. You must disregard your interest in this new journey, and this is where this way differs from worldly principles. You must count all including yourself loss, and lose sight of them all absolutely. So when Paul came to absolute surrender of himself to Jesus, he counted himself and his former gains loss. The issues about himself were forgotten. His interests also were ignored. When two men are engaged for business, the common tale is to protect your interest first. Infact good friends of yours would inquire if you have safeguarded your interest, and to do less is considered stupid. The second

party may be accused of being brain-washed by the other. This is the variance when it pertains following Jesus so that over the years some dissemblers have often misinterpreted the right way, hence the inclination to lies and falsehood.

Let's compare these two scriptures closely:

*...if anyone intends to come after me, let him forget himself...*

*... But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...*

You cannot forget yourself and yet carry your gains along. You are indeed to do away with yourself and all your gains if you would follow the Lord. When your interest is lost and you are to protect Christ's interest only there would not be room for sentiments and ungodly ambitions. The Pastor would not peg down his assistant because there is nothing of theirs they are protecting; they have lost that initial self interest at Calvary. When two brothers are fighting over positions and hierarchy, it is because they have left Christ interest to pursue theirs. When a husband and wife are irreconcilable, it is because self interest is paramount. Whenever two or more believers are fighting it is but for self interest. If you have truly lost your interest the matter for concern should have I suppose rested at the feet of Christ in solemn prayers, probably waiting for light to break forth over the matter again. Of a truth from time immemorial it has never rested at the feet of earthly magistrates. Brother you must ignore and disown even yourself if Christ must come to you.

Some do silently suggest supposedly good ideas in church gatherings, but behind such ideas are walls around their personal interest, probably because they are lusting after some certain honour or position. It is for these reasons you cannot see Jesus face. You can even fast and pray, yet you cannot see Jesus. You would therefore constantly go through spiritual declension because the Lord is far from you. To forget oneself is to lose sight of yourself and your interest, and rather fight to secure Christ interest only.

See Acts 8: 18 - 21 - *And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles hands that the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*

You know that Simon had been converted by the preaching of Phillip and had joined the brethren forum. He must have identified openly as a follower of Jesus Christ. He should I suppose had handled one or more spiritual assignment yet despising the state of his heart. His heart ab initio was not right with God. He thought to continue same gains he made from witch craft but through the ministration of the Holy Ghost; and this he had thought would be achieved by giving out money. Money, money, money, money...humh! I would like to point out a serious injunction here. First and foremost, did you consider this a strange event? Simon offered money to obtain the blessings of the Spirit, is this

strange? The other day I saw you walked to the altar to drop money in response to an ongoing sermon and you had done that thinking probably to contact the anointing or to receive the blessing by your seed. I quite remember an occasion were the minister stood to rebuke those who failed to come out when others were responding, saying how would you miss your blessing. Then suddenly the crowd rushed to the podium, each dropping their monies to receive the blessing. That was exactly what Simon did. If that is how anointing comes and blessings received, I need neither. Some of you would bring money to a big man of God, and say please pray for me, I need to contact the blessings by this seed. This was what Simon did. I would proceed to confront your heart with two similar scenarios based on the foregoing peradventure light shall break forth in your heart.

*And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is being interpreted, the son of consolation) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus. Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. - Acts 4: 36-37*

*And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us that he shall turn in thither.*

*And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunamite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.*

*And he said, what then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, about this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. - 2 Kings 4: 8-16*

The contrast between Simon and the later scenarios are distinct, while Simon was looking at his interest in service to God, the others like Barnabas and the Shunamite woman gave freely not for any selfish lucre. Barnabas gave for the Kingdom of God to be enlarged; the Shunamite desired a resting place for God's servant not minding her interest. Infact she made no request for a blessing as an exchange for her seed. So when you stepped out to drop your money, what did you desire as a reason for bringing the seed. Some thought to receive the blessing of that revelation from the sermon, not knowing that they lost it at the moment they thought to buy the blessing with money. You have no part in this matter because your heart is not right with God.

Let's see also John 6: 24-27

*When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

See the sacrifices these men made just to see Jesus. If you had not seen Jesus' response it would have seem as though their heart was right with God. Their recognition of his status and the manner they approached him all suggest how much they love and care for him. However it is worrisome to know that the entire sacrifice was for the love of bread. They had not forgotten their interest although their voices and appearances never reflected it.

### WHAT IS IMPLIED BY THE TERM 'SUFFERED LOSS'

Suffering connotes a state of discomfort and probably pain. It could mean that the matter in question for which it was addressed is neither convenient nor pleasant to the one referred to. Hence it is obvious to affirm that Brother Paul's decision to follow Christ brought him lots of pain. The 'letting go' of what he had earlier gained ere he met Christ was like a knife cutting through a skin-edge. He suffered much pain and sorrow accepting Christ. To him accepting Christ was losing his initial prestige and honour. He lost out entirely when he gained Christ. He lost his Pharisaical honour, he lost his hold on Jewish tradition, he lost his family, and he also lost that affluence and influence. He even lost his financial privileges, his best of friends and colleagues. It was truly a great loss. So when he said *'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,* it was indeed a matter to consider.

Suffering could connote a state of agony or distress. This was the condition Paul found himself when his heart answered to Jesus. He needed to lose that most precious to him, which had made up the walls of his life for many years. He needed to lose these just within a moment, not gradually, hence a decision that brought him much agony.

Here was a popular man who within a moment went into hiding for fear of being killed by his old friends. The former love his friends had for him was turned to hatred because their initial relationship was swiftly severed by love for another. They could not comprehend what love he found that made him turn his back on them, and even without a thought. Some of you are very good making inquiries, you would go asking your friends, whether you are in the right to lose - this and - that, all because you needed to follow Jesus. Some of you would go around asking people, should I really stop or sever that initial habit or relationship? Some would even meet their pastor and say; must I resign from that group or position? Yes truly, the reason for some of these queries is because the matter you are now confronted with could bring you to great

agony of the flesh and soul in order that Christ would be genuinely formed in your heart. He would want to completely sever all old ties with the world and with the devil. He is so jealous of you that he would not want to share your life with any man. Indeed nothing between me and my saviour, not even the world.

See Galatians 1: 15-16;

*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*

When the great conviction of soul fell upon Paul, he made no further consultation with any man. He visited no high priest or teachers of the law, like Great Gamaliel to inquire the justness or the infallibility of the way. He met no Apostle or those with forehand knowledge of Christ to gather more facts about the way. He suddenly came to a halt and turned his back to the world. He would have as well gone home to his family to ask if he was in the right. He made no inquiry even from his best of friends. The revelation of the Son in his heart was a stronghold that he could not relinquish. It was such that left him without questions but rather a new inclination to a greater glory and pursuit, and that alone was enough. He severed every worldly connection once and for all. I quite remember some years ago when my eldest brother encountered the cross. He was a great lover of the world and had gained several worldly friends. It would need heaven to detach him from his marriage to the world. However after Jesus met him, something unusual happened. He could not for a moment stay with his former lover; the world. He had before now kept a diary containing the contacts of all his friends, and he needed to lose these relationships once and for all, so he took the book and walked to a river and threw it in. That singular hour, his relationships changed till today. Such a decision would leave you with agony. It is like starting on a fresh slate, but now not without a guide. I remember one of our brothers who Jesus met. He had a first degree from a renowned University but had bought the results all the way through, and was at the point of forging ahead in life when Jesus met with him. He came to a halt and tore the degree certificate. He lost all and started afresh. He cannot carry such gains to follow Jesus. He suffered such loss because he needed to see Jesus. It is for the fear of coming to such pain and agony, many would rather stay back in the former way, and some mind-the-world-counselors would say it does not matter; you can take all along in the new journey with Jesus. They too have never suffered loss for the Excellency of the knowledge of Christ. They are yet married to the world. Their appetite for the world is stronger than their hold upon Jesus heart. Hence they are always mindful of the gains of the world. They would not because of Jesus sake suffer a little pain that follows such disentanglement with worldly affairs. Some of you who had before thrown away such gains even secretly lust after them again, wishing you had never made such a decision. Some carnally minded men would say: you cannot be foolish because you are following Jesus, see the pain you have gotten for yourself, why did you relinquish that amiable position? Why did you



throw away that certificate? Why did you break that relationship? Why did you disconnect from that rich man? These are queries from married-to-the-world preachers. They are clouds without rain. Salt without savour, always entering peoples' houses with the pretext of brethren visitation, and make them twice the child of hell than when they met them.

When he said *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things*, it shows that he had lost his temporal happiness and satisfaction. He profited in the Jews religion more than many of his contemporaries, and has enjoyed much satisfaction from his present occupation. He had the highest connections to the Kings and Priests of his time, and had been happy with it. He could enter any man's house and make legal suits against you. He was living both in influence and affluence. He was popular with the world and had profited from that. Hence to suddenly lose these honours was indeed a suffering. The letting go of these attachments at once was great pain.

Let's see Galatians 6: 14,

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

I would like at this point to confront you with the reason Paul could accept the pain in relinquishing those rights, and even at once. Truly though painful he bore it. He for a moment turned not back in regret of his earlier decision. The fact is that 'the world' was crucified to him. All that the world has and its beauties were crucified to him. I mean to say that the world became dead to him. That is the world became to him nonexistent. Hence to lose its gains once and for all was nothing to reconsider. Hallelujah! He actually came to the point where he deliberately severed every tie with the world.

I have actually seen believers and intended believers organize weddings and child dedications, and as I gaze into the activities, they are a display of the world, nothing of the sorts are a semblance of Christ. The occasions and the contents reflect that they are being arranged by please-the-world-believers. Something happened during my traditional marriage, as we pondered on who to invite for the music, a brother was introduced to us and he affirmed his faith in Christ to us. He was thought of as one filled with the Holyghost. But while the event went on I realized that there was a sudden switch to an unknown secular song, so one of our brothers approached the band and asked them to stop the music. The leader apologized and said he had played the music in question because it would make more people to dance. He was only a please-the-world-believer.

It is seen also from the scriptures that not only the world was crucified; he too was crucified to the world. It therefore implies that if peradventure the world is seeking for him probably that he would fill up a particular desire of theirs, he would be unavailable or yet unqualified or even completely useless to meet it. He was dead to the world. The only thing that stood between him and the world was 'death'. When the world looked in his direction, he was dead. If he looks in the direction of the world, it was also dead. The world has so many desires. It

is in want of worship. It desires attention and wants to be relevant, and hence has gotten much men prostrate at its feet, either worshipping or showing regard, but for Brother Paul he was dead. Hence to bring him to the feet of the world was indeed useless. He cannot meet your taste. I stood by a community festival some years ago because I was to pass that way. Laid on the centre table were all manner of alcoholic drinks and the masquerades were already dressed for parade. As I watched, they invited a Pastor known to me who came to lead in the opening prayers. I wondered how he managed the prayer but one thing struck my heart, that there are several prayers you pray that God was never involved and will not cast his holy eyes upon. Again what truly bothered me was this; how did that Pastor qualify to be the lead in prayers for such an event? How did the organizers see him as the qualified? Why must it be him to be invited? I realized within me that he only had put on the cloak of a saint but was indeed an alien to the common faith of Jesus Christ. He was yet alive to the world, hence would fill up all its desires. He needed to come to the point of death.

One issue about this journey is that you are most times attracted to what you are. So when the world invites you to chair its occasion and probably give a suggestion on how its kingdom would prosper, check again through and through what manner of life you carry. There are some of you, sisters that whenever men come around you, all they ask for is sex, and most of such sisters are troubled and always praying for deliverance. Yet there are others that the same category of men fear asking them to sin against God. The reason is not that the second categories of sisters are arrogant and abusive, no, not at all. But they carry a glory that attracts no evil. They are prepared and waiting for their groom. Such are they whose inner life is insurmountable by darkness. They are dead to the world. It is not because the world would not approach such the like, but the world would have to think and plan before making such attempt. These are they who fall into the Devils hands after much whims and skimming, but you will stand and not fall. Nonetheless we are not ignorant of the Devil's devices.

#### THAT I MAY WIN CHRIST

"... Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

There is an issue that stands out in all of Paul's pursuit – to win Christ. He has for this singular purpose made so much sacrifice. Hence it could portend the seemingly great danger that awaits loosing Christ and breasting the tape in the race with Christ at bay. Amidst several things to pursue, he threw himself to the pursuit of winning Christ. Even up until now men are inclined to many pursuits of life and are on these day and night. They are upbeat about these all so that believers themselves come to Christ for these same hoping that He could be the medium to gain their pursuits. You cannot win what you never pursued. Hence some have gotten so much material benefits with Christ missing because you never aimed to win Christ. Some of you

would be content if to be loaded with one material blessing upon another as you come to Church, unmindful of having Christ. When you look into your life right now, you would discover that the possessions around you presently, were things you had been pursuing for some years now, and for some others, all through their life time. I have come to realize that when you keep pursuing a particular object whether degree, a good family or a company, you would someday come to it. Those who pursued after money also got it. Those who pursued after women got them. Those who sold their lives to pursuing earthly pleasures are here satisfied with such. Some had thought that they got such things because they prayed. No, most times it is because that is what you have been pursuing. Some others truly lost out though they had pursued such things as mentioned earlier. Nonetheless most others got what they pursued. Some spiritually inclined persons have mixed prayers and hard work; or prayers and compromises in order to secure their pursuits, and have always apparently thought it to be God's blessings. However what stands out is that you got your pursuits. Now amidst several of such, Paul was not moved. He had set his priorities right and yet in accordance to scripture and as it pertains those inclined to Zion city. He threw his pursuits to winning Christ and none other.

However before we proceed to elaborate on the foregoing discourse, I am constrained to ask: what shall you then pursue after knowing that you must be inclined to something while you thread the earth? Let us look at these scriptures:

*Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Matt 6: 25 – 34*

The peoples of the world and the seminars they organize everywhere only points you to one thing – what you shall eat and how you shall be fashioned. They point you to how you shall discover self, and how self shall be fashioned. It is about you and yourself. They push you to go seeking for what has been settled in Christ Jesus. Hence any man who would not allow you obtain food, drink and clothing shall be doomed. You

become so self centered, not knowing. Sometimes you would see yourself praying all manner of prayer but focused on yourself. Some would come to church because they want to be rich. For some they want promotions. Some are seeking for jobs. Some, for husbands and wives. Some others for food and drink. I quite remember one of Paul's letters to the Philippians in chapter two verses twenty and twenty-one, he said: *For I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.* Even some clergymen so to speak are preaching for their belly sake and others for self affirmation. Some would pray so tenaciously nursing within them some consolations: Me too, I shall make it! Such think it is about driving the latest car and living in cedar houses. So it is clearly evident that the running around is not for Jesus sake. You are organizing crusades because you want to be famous. You are preaching to sinners because you want your empire enlarged. You have opened a ministry because you need some more money to fuel your ego and popularity. Some years ago while serving as campus fellowship president, a particular brother met me severally with a demand. He said please give me an opportunity to preach, and you would see what would happen. Then I would say to him if the Lord wills you shall be invited. But he was adamant, so I said go up and preach in the classrooms. However he insisted on preaching on the fellowship pulpit. Some think it is showmanship- a showing of skills, talents and anointing. This is why some of you go about begging pastors to invite you to preach.

The matter being raised in the scripture above stated clearly what you shall seek for. Consider also one important injunction: **For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.** These various pursuits truly are the preoccupations of the people of this world. These are issues bothering them and they keep breaking heads over food, fame, houses and fashion. Morning till night they are looking for money. They are seeking and praying always for such things that would satisfy their carnal desires. But for you **seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.** You shall be upbeat about the Kingdom of God. You shall seek for righteousness first. 'First' here presupposes 'only'. That is to mean seek only the Kingdom of God. Seek for righteousness only. You would say, no, my ministry is to make men rich and wealthy. Sorry, there is none of such for most of those men are actually poor, wretched and blind. This is all you have made them. You compass sea and land to reach a sinner, and after he is converted you make him twice the son of hell than when you met him. What shall you pursue beloved – righteousness and righteousness only. Truly there is none else to pursue and if such exist, the bible would have said, then seek second...but rather the issues the gentiles have sought for and died for shall be added to you. I now see why you too are pursuing such things because God is not obliged to give it to you, so you see yourself running and pursuing after them. Morning till night you are pursuing after money just like the people of this world, and it is so because you

left your duty post. Seek only the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

Sometimes even though you want to be indifferent and unperturbed in this world, someone somewhere would give you what to seek for and pursue. I tell you if you are not mindful this also would be your pursuit all your life time. Hence concerning this matter, there is no sitting on the fence. Some preachers themselves though preaching Christ, are presently preoccupied with a particular pursuit, which has become the fulcrum of their preaching. If you allow the Spirit of God to place a searchlight on your heart, you would see, even now, the reason you have ran that ministry all these years. You would see the central reason you took part in that fasting and prayer. Some unoccupied believers, that is to mean believers who seemingly do not have much engagement in church are also somewhere busy with something – for some their jobs or businesses. Some others now have so many children and families, and that has taken away their hearts. They must meet up with the demands and are hence occupied therewith. Some of these brothers were front liners for Christ years before their present new engagement but now your pursuit has changed. You are now running around for the building of your empire and your kingdom. You must seek first and only the Kingdom of God.

The earlier scriptures in this present discourse clearly show the goal before Paul, and he said thus **...and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.** He would count as dung, useless, unprofitable and valueless, all that he had earlier pursued before he met Christ. His aim is to win Christ. To him winning Christ is the end of his pursuit. He would therefore throw all weights in order to get this settled. He had a singular goal- Christ. He had one pursuit- Christ. I still enjoy the same victories today as I did more than twenty years ago, as a young boy in the Sunday school. One song that was popular amongst us was this: Holyghost, do it again, do it again, in my life. Open my eyes to see Jesus sited upon thy throne. One thing that stood before us whenever we sang this song was that we need Jesus only and must see him. Though exams may be by the corner, we do not mind. Though there is no food on the table, it is not important. Though trouble looms, Jesus we need. Truly up until now it has been our song- we need Jesus and him only. We are running and pressing on this matter. Even though the people around us do not care, we are mad at it, that we may win Jesus.

The initial energy Paul used to pursue the things he now counted dung was to be redirected to the pursuit of Christ. He was to use if possible same energy and vigor in pursuing Christ. You can attest to the fact that he truly demonstrated far more energy, even of greater focus in the pursuit of Christ. He went from one glory to another, and then to death. He ran towards this lone goal as though he had no family. It was his business and all he cared about. He knew he could lose Christ to carelessness; hence he clung to it and hoped to win Christ.

*Know ye not that they which run in a race run*

*all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* - I Corinthians 9: 24- 27

It is expedient to note that the people of this world who threw their pursuit into obtaining fame and worldly riches ran as though nothing else was at stake. They ran striving for mastery in those things they pursued. These men demonstrated all manner of attention to obtain mastership in worldly affairs. They went out even though the weather was against them. They kept themselves awake night and day to reach their targets. Some of them especially Athletes sold themselves to special training and were occupied for years and even for a life time so they can become masters. Some who faced opposition from other men even strove to the spilling of their blood, and some died in these earthly pursuits. If you see these men or hear the stories behind their pursuits, you would think they had gone for a heavenly reward. Yet they had only pursued for fading crowns, and for such rewards they laid down their lives. They threw away every other pursuit to gaining an earthly reward. Some were in prison for same cause and died without seeing the beauty of the world, yet for corruptible crowns. They desired mastery and thus got it.

Now if such who won an earthly prize would attend such commitment, how would you who look for a heavenly prize, run? For Brother Paul, he counts and considers all things dung and useless that he may win Christ. He would not meddle with earthly affairs, and would not for a second give heed to mundane until his Christ is won.

...I therefore so run...it is a run to finish. No looking back, no retreat and no surrender. He would attend to this singular matter alone and with all certainty. He has his target and is sure of his bounds. He would go the extra mile to put his body in subjection in order to win Christ. He would put all aside once and for all. When you see an athlete running in a competition, he runs as though he knows no other person around. If you give him a phone call at that nick of time, even from his best of companions, it is an effort in futility. If you jump on the lawn to get his attention, you are just wasting your time no matter who you are to him. Sometimes he even tries to run in the break of muscle cramps. He is bent on breasting the tape, and that alone is enough. Beloved of Christ, run, that you may win. If one takes your cloak forcefully, give him your coat also; do not settle down on unnecessary quarrels and distractions. Run, and look not back. Are you already pressing on to Zion city? Then look not to the perishing things of clay, look not to the economic pressures coming upon the world, look unto Jesus only. Do not sell your crown for hunger sake. Do not seek favour from Egypt. Do not for pleasure and comfort throw away the pursuit of Christ. Run that you may win! Let us pray! ■





# UNHOLY MARRIAGE

by Bro. Ayotunde Ajibola

The topic before us is one to generate differing thoughts in the hearts of different readers. Some may readily anticipate a discourse on marriage between a man and a woman. Others may think differently, about the unholy matrimony between the church and the world. These are both important considerations. But, just to be clear, this treatise/study is about the present day church which requires as a matter of emergency, our consideration and prayers. The treatise would have achieved its purpose if it is able to stir up your holy heart.

In order to avoid unnecessary conflict of opinions as regards the definition of the church used throughout the Bible, I will like to set forth the following definitions which will be used interchangeably in this study.

- The new testament church is a group of **called out ones** from both Jews and Gentles (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:14-15) and called **the body of Christ** (Mt 16:18; 1 Cor 10:32; Eph 5:23-32; Col 1:18, 24; 1 Tim 3:5,5)
- A local company of Christians who regularly meet for religious services and to transact necessary business for the proper functioning of the local or general Christian work (Mt 18:17; Act 2:47, 5:11, 13:1; Rev 2:8,12)
- Many local congregation of Christians (Acts 9:13, 15:41; Rom 16:4,16; Rev 2:7,11,17)

## GLEANINGS FROM THE SEVEN CHURCHES

There's a lot today's church can glean from the early churches, which were bedeviled by several compromises. Christ was so merciful to them by addressing, in His revelation to His beloved Apostle John, the pertinent matters that would have denied them eternal rest and relevance in the kingdom of God.

We, the present day church, will be doing

ourselves a lot of good by receiving these instructions with a ready heart of repentance at any point we are found wanting. May God open the eyes of our understanding as we glean from these instructions to the seven churches.

We must note that these admonitions/instructions were given by Christ Jesus-who is Himself the Head and Bridegroom of the church- to the churches (His body/His Bride). Now the churches that refused to heed the instructions given to them by the Lord ended up becoming what the Lord prophesied they would be if they did not repent; for example, some of the churches that were being warned by Christ in the book of Revelation were located in the present day Islamic state of Turkey. They ended up fulfilling Rev 2:5 because they refused to heed the warning of Christ Jesus.

Now let us prayerfully consider the points at which these churches embraced the world and took a leave off their Bridegroom (Christ Jesus) under three headings: **The Rebuke, The Remedy and The Reward**. We will also include a little background to each of the churches. Please read on.

## THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

(Rev 2:1-7)

### BACKGROUND

This church was established through the ministry of Apostle Paul (Acts 19). The Revival at Ephesus brought an end to the worship of their goddess, Diana. This was a turning point for the Ephesians who embraced the gospel with all their hearts. It was a great work that God wrought in their midst. In fact, they were commended by Christ at about ten points in Rev 2:1-7, revealing to us that they were greatly affected by the Gospel. For want of space we may not be able to discuss in detail the points for which they were commended by the Lord as listed here:

*"...I know thy works, and thy labour; and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted...thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."*

### THE REBUKE

*But I have this (one charge to make) against you that have left (abandoned) the love that you have at first (you have deserted me, your first love) - Rev 2:4 (Amp)*

Despite the fact that this church had labored and did not faint and were able to decipher between true and false Apostles, they were still found wanting.

Beloved, men may be commending you for the several ways in which you love the Lord, in fact, you may be regarded as the oracle of God by other believers around you, yet God has something against you.

Now, comparing the love you had for the Lord when you started and that which you have now, you can see that your love for the Lord has grown cold. You have abandoned your first love - Christ Jesus - for other things that are not Christ. Though you are receiving the commendation of men-who are blind to the call of God upon your life - you know that you have journeyed far away from where your anchor can hold on the rock of ages. Where is that burning love you had for Jesus, when you first believed? That love that always drove you into the point of consistent unbroken communion with the Lord. This first love which ought to be the pivot for every other devotion to the Lord, its desertion has rendered every other service ineffectual and unacceptable to the Lord. (cf 1 Cor 13:1-3).

Our first love should be the fountain/source of every service we offer to God. No wonder Christ said, "Not everyone that saith unto me

but he that doeth the will of my father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name have cast out devils and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity” Matt 7: 21-23.

You can do so much in the name of God but if it is in divorce with your first love, it is not acceptable to the Lord, it cannot advance/propagate the kingdom of God.

### THE REMEDY

*Remember then from what heights you have fallen. Repent (change the inner man to meet God's will) and do the works you did previously (when first you knew the Lord)...* - Rev 2:5 (Amp)

This begins with a remembrance of where you fell from. Genuine repentance is always preceded by a remembrance. Remember when you first knew the Lord, when you first began the ministry God gave to you. Remember how passionate and zealous you were, longing to see the kingdom of God established in all the earth but now your heart is filled with the pursuit of mundane things because you have forsaken your first love.

Remember and repent and do the works you did previously. Thus you will be rewarded by the Lord.

### THE REWARD

*To him who overcomes (is victorious), I will grant to eat (of the fruit) of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.* - Rev 2:7  
Let us pray.

## THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

(Rev 2:12-17)

### BACKGROUND

Pergamos was a town in Mysia on the River Caicus about 50 miles North of Sinprema. It is said to be found in present day Turkey too. Though they had some commendations from the Lord Jesus, they were also strongly rebuked for their various points of compromise

### THE REBUKE

*but I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* - Rev 2:14-15

Compare

*Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his*

*iniquity: dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells in that water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.* - 2 Pet 2:15-17

Though this church was situated where Satan's seat is (Rev.2:13), they still held fast unto the name of the Lord and did not deny the faith. In fact, Antipas was martyred because he refused to compromise his faith—he remained faithful. But they had some amongst them who held unto the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

Now Balaam was a prophet (Num. 22-24) who for the reward of unrighteousness (material possession) taught the king of Moab (Balak) how he might conquer the Israelites in battle. This stumbling block is what is regarded as the doctrines of Balaam. These doctrines include fornication and eating foods sacrificed to idols. (Num 25:1-3, 31:16).

Some churches today actually hold such doctrines in their midst; they say something like, “Our faith does not forbid us from embracing the idols of our ancestors”. Many pastors cannot rebuke their erring congregations because of the reward of the iniquity they long to receive from them. The want of truth on the pulpit has made several men who should have become the heroes of our faith to end up on Delilah's lap. If you refuse to preach the whole truth to your congregation, O Pastor, because you don't want to be disfavored with them, you will very soon lose favor with God. Shall we displease God while trying to please men? God forbid! You are placed over that church as a custodian of the oracles of God, to uphold the truth come rain, come shine. Do not follow the path Balaam followed. Though he was supposed to be a Prophet of God he ended up a soothsayer. Repent brother, repent sister. If you refuse to repent, you will be cast into outer darkness where there will be gnashing of teeth. And remember the truth (which you refuse to stand for) will always prevail in the end.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans was similar to the doctrines of Balaam and Jezebel. The Nicolaitans, followers of Nicolaus, a heretic, practiced and taught impure and immoral doctrines such as a man having a community of wives, that committing adultery and fornication was not sinful and that eating meals offered to idols was lawful.

Now many of such doctrines are being taught by many men today, and the gullible ones amongst us are embracing them.

Some of such belong to a group(s) that do not submit to any local church or assembly and they reject any spiritual authority over their lives. Some have ratified divorce and gay marriage in their churches. These are all doctrines from the pit of hell that have

wormed their way into the church.

Many pastors have refused to speak against such because of the reward of iniquity they receive from such men. No wonder their labour has been in futility, considering the fruits that attend such teachings. No likeness of Christ can be wrought in their congregations.

### THE REMEDY

*Repent (then) or else I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* - Rev 2:16

Repent of your evil ways. That is the only way you can come back into favour with God. No matter how neck-deep you are into these false doctrines, make a 180 degree turn back to God and bring forth fruits that are meet/evidence of your repentance. But if you refuse to repent you will become an enemy of God. After repentance embrace the Word of God which is the comprehensive equipment for changing lives.

### THE REWARD

This is your reward if you repent and do not go back.

*...To him who overcomes (conquers) I will give to eat of the manna that is hidden (the precious word of God), and I will give him a white stone with a new name engraved on the stone, which no one knows or understands except he who receives it.*

*He who repents and overcomes will have exclusive right to the hidden manna (the precious word of God).* - Rev 2:17

In ancient times the white stone is a victory stone and also meant pardon and the evidence of it. Conquerors in the public games were also given white stones with their names on them, which entitle them to be supported for the rest of their lives at public expense.

Perhaps all 3 things depict what the white stones mean to the overcomers.

Let us pray.

## THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

(Rev 2:18-29)

### BACKGROUND

This church, which was also located in present day Turkey, had its own point of unholy marriage. They were indeed commended in 6 things which they were doing right but were rebuked for tolerating the wrong things.

### THE REBUKE

*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou suffers that woman Jezebel which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication. and to eat things sacrificed to idols.* - Rev 2:20



*idols.* - Rev 2:20

Any church that refuses to confront sin for what it is can be likened to this church in Thyatira - the tolerant church. Some churches in countries where gay marriage has been legalized have begun to *tolerate* them by refusing to confront them in their messages. They choose to expunge from their Bibles particular portions that discourage such practices.

This was exactly what was happening in Thyatira. They tolerated Jezebel the prophetess and her doctrines, they refused to confront her. They forgot that such doctrines do spread like cancer/gangrene.

There are many churches that have good doctrines that they uphold but have refused to confront their members who have some dark areas in their lives. Some of these 'no-go areas' include stealing of public funds by politicians, indecent dressing by members of the church, gay marriage etc. Pastors of various congregations have become tolerant of such people and their doctrines, indirectly approving of their lives, just as it was in the church in Thyatira.

Remember God is not a respecter of persons. If such men refuse to repent, God will cast them into great tribulation, until there is no remembrance of them anymore.

Do not tolerate evil in your church, even the minutest of evils. Confront evil with the infallible word of God. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. So the word says in Rom 12:21. Do not have a soft spot for sin. It is like cancer that has the tendency to spread and corrupt as many as it can.

### THE REMEDY

*...And I gave her space to repent of her fornication and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.*

*And I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he which search the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.* - Rev 2:21-23

The only solution for this degree of decay is genuine repentance. The alternative is to be cast out. If allowed to spread, it will corrupt the whole lump. And that is why such a severe remedy was meted out. In fact, God said he will kill her children with death if they refuse to repent in order to show all the churches the he is the God that searches the reins and hearts, the same position taken by Paul against everyone who spreads wrong doctrines. At a time, he declared them accursed and handed some over to Satan, showing us that this is not a matter to be

treated lightly. Are you secretly embracing the wrong doctrines that have bedeviled several aspects of your life? Please repent now as the searchlight of God's word beams upon those dark areas of your heart.

### THE REWARD

*And he that overcomes, and keeps my word unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my father. And I will give him the morning star.* - Rev 2:26-28

These are the rewards of the faithful overcomers.

### THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

(Rev 3:1-6)

This is a church located in a city about 40 miles East of Smyrna, the ancient capital of Lydia.

### THE REBUKE

*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful; and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.* - Rev 3:1-2

The greatest undoing of many is to work tirelessly at preserving their reputation amongst men. They prefer the commendation of men to God's approval. In fact they can go to any extent to win the approval of men rather than God's. It's like a patient who was taken to the hospital emergency room by relatives who thought he was still alive, only for the Doctor to certify him as BID (Brought in Dead). You can imagine the sorrow and sense of disappointment in those relatives. Such was the case of this church. Christ said regardless of their glorious reputation amongst men, they were DEAD. They lost connection with their ultimate source of life. They lacked the vitality of a continuous union with Christ Jesus. Could it be that whereas God has declared your position vacant, you are basking there in the euphoria of worldly applause, having grandiose delusions of how well you are doing? You are living a lie. Remember from whence you have fallen. Repent and return to Jesus now before it is too late. O Lord, may I not be found in the congregation of the dead (of the very dry bones). They are like empty barrels that make the loudest noise. My beloved, repent because God has not found thy works perfect before him.

Let us consider this scripture in the Amplified version: I know your record and what you are doing, you are supposed to be alive, but (in reality) you are dead. Rouse yourselves and keep awake, and strengthen and invigorate what remains and is on the point of dying, for I have not found a thing that

you have done (any work of yours) meeting the requirements of my God or perfect in his sight.

Beloved, God is saying you are supposed to be alive, full of the life of Christ, but in reality you are dead. Men around you may fail to notice this, but God is bearing his searchlight on your life in order to reveal to you your true state. Though all you are doing is meeting men's requirement, it has not met the requirements of God. How sad! For you to still have some portions that have not yet died, it implies that initially the ones that are now dead were alive, filled with the life of God. This is the state of a backslider in heart.

This is a matter of prayer for me. Let us pray.

### THE REMEDY

*Rouse yourselves and keep awake and strengthen and invigorate what remains and is on the point of dying;* - Rev 3:2-3(AMP)

*So remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent* - Rev 3:2-3(KJV)

The first instruction is a call to revival, to a reawakening from the state of death/sleep. Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall give thee life (Eph 5:14). Rouse yourselves and keep awake is the Lord's injunction. Don't fall asleep again because the coming of the Lord is nigh.

Secondly, strengthen and invigorate what remains and is at the point of dying. Whatever virtue is left that has not experienced the touch of death must be strengthened. They must be fanned into an inferno. They must be rekindled. Strengthen them with the strength which Christ supplies through the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, remember how thou hast received and heard and hold fast to the truth and repent. Remember the incorruptible foundation that was laid for you in the Word of God, hold fast to it and return in repentance. Do not neglect them again, continue in them and thy profiting shall appear unto all.

### THE REWARD

*He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my father, and before his angels.* - Rev 3:5

This is the reward of him that fully embraces the admonition of the Holy Spirit by repenting and upholding that which remains and is at the point of dying. What a glorious reward to be clothed in white raiment of righteousness and to have my name in the book of life. That for me is an encouragement unto faithfulness till the end. Let us pray.

**THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA**

(Rev 3:14-22)

The Laodicean Church was located in the modern day Turkey. Many have described the present church age as the Laodicean Church age. The age of lukewarmness, when several false doctrines have pervaded the pulpits of many churches.

**THE REBUKE**

Rev 3:15-17 (NLT): I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other. But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, I am rich. I have everything I want, I don't need a thing! And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

This is the condition of today's presumptuous, seeker-friendly church that seems to be in need of nothing. Talk about wealth (material things), they have it and they believe that material possession is the evidence of God's approval of a ministry. They have forgotten that even the heathen are privileged to have material possessions. This is not the faith our fathers passed unto us. Our fathers embraced the supremacy/sovereignty of God's word over every matter.

Christ described the Laodicean church as wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. What a description of a lukewarm church! Though it seemed to be well accomplished in the eyes of men, it was most distasteful in God's sight.

The realization of our present state will propel us to seek God for help in order for us to be delivered from this affliction of lukewarmness. One thing about a lukewarm church is that you don't know/can't tell where they belong – whether for or against Christ. They are indifferent. They seem to 'effectively' combine both worldliness and spirituality. They bestride the threshold, with one foot in and the other out. They are double-minded, unstable in all their ways, tossed to and fro, halting between two opinions (Jam1:6-8; Eph4:14; 1Kings 18:21). Christ will have us be either cold or hot in order to know how he can help us.

**THE REMEDY**

Rev 3:18-19 (NLT): I advise you to buy gold from me - gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garment so you will not be ashamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference.

There are 4 provisions for the salvage of this Laodicean-age church:

One is to buy from God true riches, treasures laid in heaven. Gold that has been purified

by fire. Second is to purchase the white garment of righteousness to clothe our nakedness. Third is to purchase the ointment for our eyes in order to be able to see and have proper evaluation of eternal things. Fourth is to be diligent and turn from our indifference.

All these purchases are to be made by the currency of grace. Let us maximize the grace that has been made available to us in Christ in order to move out of our lukewarmness.

**THE REWARD**

The reward of response to this call by Christ is clearly written in Rev 3:20-21 NLT

Look! Here I stand at the door and knock, if you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends.

I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my father on his throne.

This is the reward of the victorious ones they will share fellowship with Christ and sit with Him on his throne.

**THE MODEL CHURCH:  
THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA**

The true and model church which has not compromised in unholy communion with the world is the Philadelphia church which we must all labour to be part of. Here is their testimonial which we must prayerfully go through: Rev3: 7-13

*And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Philadelphia write: these are the words of the Holy One, the True One, He who has the Key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one shall open.*

*I know your (record of) work and what you are doing. See! I have set before you a door wide open which no one is able to shut, I know that you have little power and yet you have kept My Word and guarded my message and have not renounced or denied my name.*

*Take note! I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie-behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and learn and acknowledge that I have loved you.*

*Because you have guarded and kept my word of patient endurance (have held fast the lesson of my patience with the expectant endurance I give you), I also will keep you (safe) from the hour of trial (testing) which is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell upon the earth.*

*I am coming quickly, hold fast what you have, so that no one may rob you and*

*deprive you of your crown.*

*He who overcomes (is victorious), I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, he shall never be put out of it or go out of it, and I will write on him the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which descends from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

What a glorious church! Though they were feeble/weak, yet they never compromised the word of God. They uncompromisingly kept the word of truth. No wonder Christ was proud to associate with such a church.

**CONCLUSION**

Your personal ambition of building an empire for yourself with the costly anointing upon your head should not be at the expense of the unity of the body of Christ. Every single ministerial calling is not for pursuit of personal/carnal ambition. It is for the edification and perfection of the saints. Our finest officers have become casualties in this raging battle against the body of Christ. This grieves my heart. How have the mighty fallen.

See 2 Sam 1:19-27: *The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offering. For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul as though he had not been anointed with oil... How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan, thou was slain in thine high places... How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished?*

This was the lamentation of David for Saul and Jonathan. This is also for several of our officers who have fallen in their high places and succumbed to the fiery darts of the enemy. They were men who started well but fell in the battle. They compromised their stand and embraced the world. Such men are to be remembered in our prayers, that they may be restored to God in sweet communion.

Let him that thinks he stands, beware lest he falls.

*Be sober, vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. 1 Pet 5:8-9.*

Let us pray Zech 10:1: *Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain, so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to everyone in the field.* ■





# AFTER CHRIST

by Bro. Manasseh Oguru

Beloved of the father, I thank my God through Jesus Christ our Lord for granting us privilege to consider few issues which are peculiar in the heart of God for us. I greatly desire that you shall be reached as we diligently look into the perfect law of liberty. The pursuit of Christ Jesus is a holy course which several persons have taken. Some even if they pursued, could not win Christ Jesus because of the various weights which have restricted them from triumphing. Some others have earnestly contended and through Christ Jesus they won at last. However, even if they have won Christ Jesus, they are still in pursuit of other things. We shall consider the study before us under these headings

1. Is there another after Christ?
2. Jesus, not a means to an end
3. Living by faith

## IS THERE ANOTHER AFTER CHRIST?

The pursuit of vanity is what makes many a man think there are other things worthy of our attention after Christ Jesus has been won, not knowing that Jesus Christ is all sufficient. The hearts of many men have been given to things devoid of substance and meaning, to wit: they lack eternal relevance. Beloved I want you to this day know that there is no other relevant name, authority or knowledge after Christ.

*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* - 1 Cor 2:2 NIV

Looking closely at the scripture before us we shall discover that the beloved apostle was satisfied with the knowledge of Christ and wanted nothing more. We should also see that his decision for the knowledge of Jesus Christ alone was not spontaneous. It was a deliberate resolve he took. This implies that he was also faced with so many other issues but decided to settle for Christ Jesus alone knowing that there is no other after Christ. Once a man encounters the Lord, every other issue becomes unimportant because Christ Jesus is enough. Such an encounter renders your

previous desires, agenda, or pursuit meaningless. The elders and fathers of faith who obtained a good report were no strangers to this encounter which immediately brought their personal ambitions to an end.

*Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.* - Ecc12:11 NIV

It is sad to know that you still hold worthless things in high esteem and your focus is on vanity even after meeting Jesus. This matter became a weight in the heart of King David which made him pray with burden in this manner;

*Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.* - Ps 119:37 NIV

Why is it that the things in which the psalmist was praying to get rid of are the same things you are earnestly chasing and wishing to possess? Several times, vanity makes us feel empty and see the need to amass wealth and gather as much as we can, whereas the man who has his eyes fixed on the Lord only, is at rest. Have u wondered why there's so much emptiness in you even if you now possess Christ? It is because vanity has occupied your heart so much that you still look out for other worldly things which are of no eternal value. The patriarchs who ran before us knew that there was no other issue worthy of attention and they fixed their eyes only on Christ Jesus our Lord. It is my sincere prayer this moment that God shall cause permanent hatred between you and worthless things. Let us rehearse a stanza of a hymn by Brother Isaac Watt;

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

How powerful is such an encounter that renders our desires and interest inoperable. If you still strongly hold your personal interest then you have not had this great encounter and

you should immediately raise a prayer to heaven for this encounter.

*What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ* - Phil 3:8 NIV

The things which were considered rubbish by the disciples of Jesus Christ have become our greatest goal and assets. That's why you can hardly sleep because you are strategizing on how to become the richest and most influential man. I consider this vanity! Satan, the enemy of our faith makes us chase vanity silently in our hearts and religiously make us not see anything wrong with it. All that exists in your heart now is marriage, success, promotion, prosperity, self-improvement, and you are vigorously chasing it even without considering that your spiritual life and stand with God is shrinking away. I consider it vanity! But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. We must note that when God says "seek first", it doesn't mean there are other things to seek. It means, "Seek only". Beloved I tell you the truth, the kingdom of God and His righteousness is the only thing we should aim and strive after.

I have now met God, but please God wait for me, there are yet some things I need to get. This is the state of mind of many. If God today gives you great riches, do you think you would be satisfied? You are not satisfied with possessing Jesus and you will never be satisfied when you possess wealth, success and intelligence. I know a man (King Solomon) that despite his meeting God; he still had other issues occupying his heart. He had international recognition, enormous wealth and several women to attend to the needs of his flesh. However, happiness was a scare resource in his house despite all he had. So we see him lamenting and speaking in great regret about vanity.

*I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.* - Ecc1:14 NIV

Solomon described how you chase fame, money, educational degrees as a chase after the wind. Can a man catch the wind? I have never seen a man that was successful in chasing after the wind and catching it, that's why even if you now have two degrees, cars, houses and lands, you still seem unsatisfied. This is because you can't catch the wind. A man chasing the wind has no definite direction like the wind, that's why today you are here and tomorrow there. Beloved please leave the wind alone and be satisfied with Christ Jesus for there is none after Christ. I pray today that your chasing shall for Christ Jesus alone be and not after the wind. Education, pleasure, humor, wine, projects, possessions, music and even wisdom couldn't satisfy Solomon.

*And I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will succeed me - Ecc12:18 AMP*

You are vehemently pursuing vanity because you don't understand that all these things shall be added to you. A preacher once said, "I hate poverty more than I hate Satan" so we see him striving to acquire great possession. Jesus to him is not enough. If these things shall be added unto us, why then should we seek them? Again consider me this, vanity! So many persons even after encountering Christ are striving for recognition, relevance and vain glory, so we see them print bold adverts of themselves and blow their trumpets so high to be noticed and applauded of men. So many in course of pursuing vanity have made ship wreck of their faith and have quietly turned away from the master. Beloved, how long shall your heart be glued to vanity and momentary pleasure?

*O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah. - Ps 4:2 KJV*

My prayer for you is that God shall save you from pursuing vanity and hold fast to Christ Jesus alone. Please pray along with me before we proceed.

As we proceed, I want you to know that there is no other authority after Christ. Many have surrendered to the authority of the world system. No other person has been approved for us to follow save Christ. Something very significant to us as Christians happened on the mount of transfiguration.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mountain. Moses and Elijah were not ordinary men and they had great works standing to their credit. So when Peter saw them, he quickly suggested that three tabernacles be built for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Heaven interrupted immediately because Peter was producing an offence. Beloved, a tabernacle is significant to the Jews as a sacred place of worship. Building three tabernacles there means placing Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the same platform or pedestal in other words seeing them as colleagues. While Peter was still speaking, a

cloud overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. Even if these men are great, heaven only recognizes the authority of Jesus Christ. I have heard people severally quote their pastors and spiritual heads on issues that are repugnant and inconsistent with that which Jesus preached. Some have built their faith around mortal men and permit me to remind you that there is none after Christ. Your pastor could be anointed but Jesus Christ is the standard. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. They saw only Jesus: this implies that Christ is all we need to see and acquire. Until you see Jesus alone and recognized that there is none after Christ your pursuit of vanity shall not cease. Some of us even try to practice some things which some prophets practiced which Jesus did not do. Remember how the apostles wanted to call down fire like Elijah but that was inconsistent with the ways of Christ. Many people spend all their time praying for the death of their enemies, did Jesus do that? I consider this vanity! There is no other doctrine save that which Jesus preached and you have all these years been given to doing it your own way. Please take it personal at this point and dethrone every other image, doctrine or authority save Christ Jesus our Lord.

### JESUS, NOT A MEANS TO AN END

I want you to know that, winning Christ is not an invitation to have continuous good times. The disciples of Jesus had nothing on their minds when they abandoned all and followed the master. This was so because Christ Jesus was enough for them and they were not bothered about other issues after Christ.

I have heard several preachers preach on marriage, success, promotion, prosperity, self-improvement, popularity etc., and we hear them say; "if you want to enjoy this success, marriage, promotion, prosperity, academic excellence, favor, come and give your life to Jesus". And I see so many running to surrender to Jesus because of prosperity, success, marriage and several other things. They have used Jesus as a means to get other things. Let me at this point quickly inform you that Satan can also give you all these things so if that is what you seek, there's no need wasting your time, quickly join one occult group.

So many scientists, medical doctors, engineers, musician whom the world celebrates today had no bearing with Jesus because Satan could give them all they need. So, if you have come because you want to have these things permit me to say to you that you have missed it. I had a classmate who is an unbeliever and always desired the big life. One day he attended a big convention and surrendered his life to Jesus. When we met, he was explaining to me that there were several rich men and influential people in that

convention and the pastor said "if you give your life to Christ, you would be like these people". Then he came out because he desires to be like those big men. He didn't last one week in faith. Jesus Christ is not a means to an end. I have severally heard people say "give God a wonderful offering to attract your blessings". So people no longer give to God for love and appreciation. They now give to God in order to get more

We shall consider few scriptures as we proceed in our study. Let us reflect on a very important account from John 6:24-60

*Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" - John 6:24-25 NIV*

The first issue I shall raise here is that these people were very zealous for the master. They didn't search for Jesus some days after he left or few hours after he left them. They began their search immediately they noticed he was no longer with them. They went as far as taking boats and travelled to Capernaum in search of Jesus Christ and their search was fruitful as they found Him. Rabbi when did you get here they asked. This they asked because they always had their focus and attention on Jesus so they were astonished to find him in Capernaum without them noticing his departure. Jesus knowing their hearts quickly responded to their query;

*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." - John 6:26-27 NIV*

Their zeal to seek the master was just because they have been fed and probably needed more. Many of us have in like manner travelled long distances for church conventions and retreats not because we desire an encounter with Jesus but because we want marital bliss, favour, promotion, contracts, success and many other foods that spoils as Jesus described. The crowd was not in any way interested in the miraculous signs. All that was pertinent in their heart and was the prime mover of their zeal to seek the master was food. Again I say to you, Jesus is enough. Every other thing you are chasing in the name of Jesus won't satisfy because Jesus is not a means to an end.

*So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' - John 6:30-31 NIV*

When they were finally interested in miraculous signs, all they could think about is food and how to eat in the same way their fore



fathers ate. Some of you even pray like this saying, oh God if truly you are my saviour, do this. If you are the Lord of the universe, do this and this. Again I cry from my heart, Jesus is not a means to an end or a spare tire. You only need him when you are hungry, tired, thirsty and so on. You only remember Jesus when you are sick and when your rent expires because you think there are other things after Christ. You have now come to Christ because of the job or contract you are pursuing.

*Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." - John 6:32-36 NIV*

I honestly thought at this point they should have realized that they were pursuing the wrong thing. They still had their desires strongly on bread.

*At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" - John 6:41-42 NIV*

How would Jesus dare to say he is the bread of life? How could he at this point destroy all their hopes of getting food?

*On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" - John 6:60 NIV*

A simple truth I tell you today, if you don't get that material thing that brought you to Jesus, you would turn your back at Him, that's the reason why so many have stopped following. They joined a church to get a husband, and after waiting for several years and their desire was not met, they left. Then you aren't different from the crowd. Jesus is not a means to an end. So many people run to conventions, retreats and other religious gathering not because they earnestly seek the Lord but because they want to use God to get contracts, favours and the rest.

Something happened in Luke chapter 12 which is peculiar to our study. The Bible says a crowd of many thousands gathered. They were so much so that there was stampede and this was a golden opportunity for the Lord Jesus to harvest many souls to the kingdom. Jesus began to speak to them about pertinent issues relating to hypocrisy, uncovering secrets, fear of God, blasphemy. We see that the nature of this sermon of Christ must have captured the hearts of many listening. Suddenly someone in the crowd shouted "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." For Jesus to hear his voice in the midst of this crowd means he must have been sitting or standing in front. Getting a front position in this mighty gathering can only be achieved by zealous people who come early enough, however his zeal was rather for his inheritance instead of

that which Christ presented. Let me say here that his reason for attending this meeting with Jesus is to use Jesus to get his inheritance. How could he think of such unimportant issues in the midst of this teaching which is capable of forever changing his life? All that Jesus was teaching didn't appeal to him because all that has won his heart is his inheritance. So many of us today have used Jesus as a means to an end and God is not pleased that you are more concerned about your desires and interest than the course of the Lord. I pray therefore that your zeal would not be for perishable things. Please briefly talk to God.

## LIVING BY FAITH

Perishable things constantly seek our attention and the way to triumph in other not to exchange our glorious hope of eternity with Jesus is living by faith. Living by faith helps us to focus only on Jesus even if the world is vehemently wooing us by presenting those things which charm us most. We shall together consider what it implies to live by faith.

Living by faith implies;

### 1. Trusting God.

*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. - Heb 11:6 KJV*

It is of no use to come to God without believing that he is, and that He rewards them that are given to seeking him diligently. Never has any man sought God diligently and was rewarded with disappointment. The patriarchs of old had no regrets whatsoever following the Lord with all their heart as they so did. The problem with our generation is that our impetuosity to get all at once makes us lose trust in the Holy one who is able to do all things. Abraham abandoned his kindred and moved as God bade him even if he knew not where he was going. This he did because he trusted He that has called him. The truth I tell you this day, if only you can trust in God for your every need, you shall not be disenchanted. So many have even misdirected their trust to men in whom there is no hope. Psalm 146:3

Remembering your rich parents or relatives or even the fact that you are highly placed or connected is vanity. Trust not on your riches or that which man can give. If your confidence is not totally placed in God then you are yet to live by faith.

*Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. - Jer 9:4 KJV*

*At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand." - 2 Chron 16:7 NIV*

Many of us have lost victories because our hearts diverted our trust away from God. If you shall deliberately decide to totally trust in God this day, He shall deliver you from the pursuit

of other things.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. There is not a need of ours that God cannot meet.

*Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? - Matt 6:25-26 KJV*

### 2. Living by Gods provision

*Give us this day our daily bread. - Matt 6:11 KJV*

So many of us strive to get more than God is releasing to us at a time and we end up chasing the wind to wit: pursuing vanity and perishable things. Jesus our Lord taught us to pray in this manner saying, "Give us **this day** our daily bread" however this is not the prayer of so many today because we are trying to amass all we need for several years in one day. In so doing you discover that your heart silently turns away from God and you embrace vanity. We shall understand this teaching of our Lord more as we consider other translations of the Bible

*Give us today our daily bread. (NIV)*

*Give us our food again today, as usual. (TLB)*

*Give us today the food we need. (GNT)*

*Give us the food we need for each day. (Easy-to-Read Version)*

Beloved once you begin to ask for more than you need, then you are heading for vanity and you may not notice how greed would silently occupy your heart. Such a man that has been overwhelmed with greed in his heart can never be caught praying for revival or the course of God. The numerous words of his prayers shall tilt towards asking for his own benefit. Beloved, when will you be satisfied with Jesus? Many of us are no longer satisfied with that which God has to us provided, and this is the reason for our covetousness. Why do you live as though you are competing with your neighbor? If God has not provided for you that which your neighbor now enjoys, live on that which he has provided. Some pastors now desire to build mighty cathedrals because other ministers around them are building such. If all God has provided for you is a square meal, eat it with joy and thanksgiving in your heart. Do not wear yourself out trying to get rich or get that which your friends and colleagues have. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

*So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time. - Matt 6:34 TLB*

I will like you to respond to God in prayers. ■



# A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE FIRE

by Sis. Nimfon Essiet

I was standing by a bus stop a few years ago when I overheard a group of taxi-drivers discussing excitedly about a certain Pastor of a Nigerian-based ministry, while waiting for passengers to fill up their cabs. I was particularly struck by the description of this Minister of God by one of the taxi-drivers. He said, and I quote, in our local Nigerian *Pidgin* English, “*Ah, Pastor XYZ, that one na Firebrand o!!!*” And they went on and on about how fierce, fearless and fervent the Pastor usually was when on the pulpit.

As I pondered over the topic of this discourse, 'A brand plucked out of the fire', I couldn't but recall the incident recounted above. I smiled again as I remembered yet another beautiful story about the famous revivalist John Wesley who after he had miraculously escaped death from a burning house was told these words by his mother, Susanna, 'You, indeed, are a brand plucked out of the fire'. John Wesley certainly didn't leave us in doubt of that fact.

Let us examine the scripture before us. In order to better understand the context, it will help to begin from the first verse, and end at the fifth, for now.

*And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. - Zec 3:1-5*

This story is so real, so relatable. So I enter the scene, it's like a throne room. I see Joshua, the High Priest, standing before the Angel of the Lord. I look to his right and I'm not surprised

at who I see. There he is, that old serpent, Satan, the Devil, opposing the High Priest of God. I am not surprised because I recall that in Rev 2:9-10, he is the accuser of the brethren, and this he does before God night and day. Always ready to bring a charge against God's elect. Ever prepared to take up a cause against the beloved. Waiting for the slightest mistake, the tiniest loophole that he may find an occasion to attack the brethren. He is ever mustering his unseen array, waiting for our unguarded hours.

But as he pours out his endless and baseless accusations (most of them false, because he's a liar and the father of lies), he is silenced; Oh, a divine interruption. The voice of the Great One cuts him short. “*The Lord rebuke you, O Satan!*” I can hear it; it's loud and clear. “*Even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee!*” He (the adversary) is stunned. He cannot believe his ears. He looks at Joshua and points at him, sneering, “*See how filthy his garments are*”. “*Enough!*” thunders the Lord Almighty, “*Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*”

At this time I'm caught in the intrigue. I see his face (I mean the accuser), defeated. There's not another word to be heard from him. I see Joshua, trembling. I look at His countenance (the Lord), if I can behold it, but I'm near-blinded by the beaming ray of mercy from His eyes. I look away, awe-struck. “*Take away the filthy garment from him,*” the Lord commands, and lo, it is done. He continues, “*I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.*” Then Enters Zechariah, the prophet, saying, “*A fair mitre, Lord, be set upon his head.*” And it is done. I see a new Joshua with new garments and a nice headdress. I can't hold the tears from my eyes. I cry out like the Psalmist, “*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!*” - Psa 32:1.

God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). When we had on our filthy garments of sin and self-righteousness (Isa 64:6), he washed us, cleansed us, purged us,

took away the filthy garments and gave us a change of clothes, presenting us holy, righteous, spotless and blameless before the presence of His glory (Eph 1:4, Eph 5:27, Jude 1:24, I Thess 5:23). He plucked us out of the fires of hell and eternal destruction and damnation, pouring out the fury of His wrath upon His Son, in our place. Behold, we are escaped! Like a bird out of the snare of the fowler (Psa 124:7). We have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet 1:4) and are now partakers of His divine nature.

He took away the record of offenses and accusations against us, nailing it to His cross (Col 2:14-15), spoiling/defeating principalities and powers (disarming and rendering them powerless over us).

Many have witnessed great deliverance from sin, sicknesses and diseases, demonic oppressions and manipulations, addictions, immorality, uncleanness, masturbation, pornography, drug abuse, lying and deceit, failure, the list is endless, because God in His mercy plucked them out, that they may not be consumed by these vices. If only you can believe and subsequently understand what happened at the Cross and at redemption, you too will experience this mighty saving power of God. He will pluck you out of the wild olive tree and graft you into a good olive tree (Rom 11:24). Hallelujah!

Our approach to witnessing to souls is wonderfully described in Jude 1:23 “*And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire...*” In the same way as Christ plucked us out so we are to pluck others out of the fires of hell and destruction.

There is yet another perspective of this discourse that completes the picture and sets us in motion. When I examined the key words in the second verse of the chapter. I made a few findings. The story will not be complete without this aspect. This is the very reason why we were plucked out of the fire.

The root word for *brand* in our text is *firebrand* referring, (in many different places

*(Continues from page 11)*



One thing that characterised the journey of Christhood is the sufferings of Christ, of which the first Christians were no strangers. And even in this present time, the first requirement needed to be fulfilled to follow Jesus is to look for your cross and take it. To follow without carrying your cross on your shoulders is to be a breach breaker.



“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me”. Matt: 10v38

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goforwardonline@yahoo.com  
maranatha@goforwardmissions.com  
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