

UNCHAIN THE PREACHER!

(MANUAL OF A BONDSMAN)



TOMI AKALA

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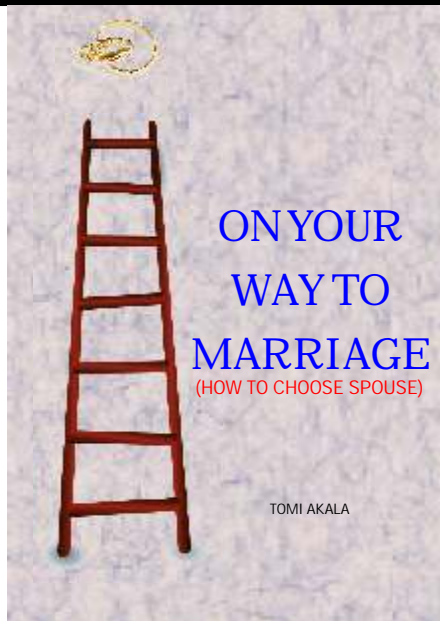
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UNCHAIN THE PREACHER!
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REASON FOR WRITING

I write the words of this book as I feel a divine compulsion to do so.

This is not an academic exercise. This is not an academic exercise. This is not an academic exercise.

PURPOSE OF WRITING

The words of this book are written to all named with the name of Christ, and especially to those who have been personally called out by the Lord to forsake all forms and traces of individual goals and ambitions – in order to stand as physical shepherds guiding God’s sheep - that they may be aptly reminded to keep the Lord’s work till the end, lest they become foolish to do their own works and run in vain – seeing that they will be twice held accountable, and twice punished if they failed to make heaven (Revelations 2:26; Matthew 7:21-27; Jeremiah 48:10; James 3:1). Indeed, the divinely called preacher – irrespective of his appellation (be it high-sounding or modest) – is officially funded by the Spirit with a flux of practically forcible zeal to do God’s work in season and out of season (1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Timothy 4:2). And speaking of appellation, the words preacher, pastor, minister and man of God shall be used interchangeably in this book.

I am aware that some ministers, for example, believe they have not been called to be a teacher of the word but a “prophet” or some kind of miracle worker so that they never bother their anointed heads with the glorious endeavour of rightly dividing and preaching biblical truths. While I am well aware of the doctrine of the indiscriminate distribution of the ascension gifts (Ephesians 4:11), I also know that the Scriptures do not teach that a minister should or can only have one

gift at a time. In fact, the New Testament shows evidences of holy men of God designated to a specific ministerial office and yet expressing the gifts of other ministerial offices. John the Baptist, for instance, is called a prophet and he did a lot of preaching and teaching; as a matter of fact, you cannot separate the Prophet office from preaching and even teaching. Brother Paul reckoned himself an apostle, an evangelist and a teacher (2 Timothy 1:11). In fact, we see Apostle Paul prophesy in Acts chapters 13:9-11 and 20: 29–31. Even the Old Testament prophets were also teachers for they ran prophet colleges - whether in a formal or informal setting, that matters nothing.

I unequivocally say here, based on biblical premise, that if any man thinks he lacks the accoutrement to preach or teach the word, let such not pastor a church for to pastor is to be filled with the Holy Spirit enough to nourish the sheep with the honest milk of the word. Again, if any thinks himself a prophet or spiritual but is yet an infant in the knowledge of the word, let such one freely express his gifts as the Holy Ghost moves him but let him nonetheless be under the ministerial supervision of another who is skilled in the word and full of the Holy Ghost until he has heard and studied enough to show himself approved and has learnt to test every spirit, lest he falls into the disaster of the novice pulling down many sheep with him. And let such acknowledge that these things that we write are the mind of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:29, 37; 1 John 4:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 6:3; Exodus 18:21).

CHAPTER 1

WHO ARE YOU PASTOR?

Our earliest brothers of this side of the cross, and who physically saw and handled the Lord, did not hesitate to relate to Him the public view of Him (i.e. the man Jesus). However, our Lord was rather keen on a disciple's personal and even intimate knowledge of Himself: Who do you (singular) say I am? (Matthew 16:17). And now in these last days when much humanism and Psychology pervades popular Christianity, the Holy Spirit moves His own men to ask pertinent questions one of which is: who are you pastor (or bishop or archbishop or reverend or prophet or apostle)?

In my university days, I once sat to receive a lecture on war and peace. Yes, war is brutal and peace is pleasant but that was not the point. The interesting thing for me was that the whole class realised that the scholars of this world have copious definitions for war but they have nothing much to say about peace other than the fact that it is the absence of war. Obviously! Indeed, mankind would rather apply itself to knowing and doing evil, but the knowledge of God destroys wickedness! And glory to our God who excels in all wisdom, and to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the beginning and the end of the sublime wisdom that designed the universe, and to the Holy Ghost the Great Counsellor who gives the saints to be wiser than all the scholars, philosophers and psychologists of this world put together. God is holy and infinitely right. His definition of a minister of the gospel of Christ is perfect and everything contrary to His word on the subject is evil. (Psalm 12:6; Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Now, the scriptures provide sufficient descriptions of who a minister of God is as well as who he is not. However, I would like to start with a few persons whom a pastor is not, so help me God.

PASTOR YOU ARE...

NOT A BUSINESS MAN

Today, one can easily mistake many church ministers for investment bankers or market strategists – well, maybe that is what they have become. The magnitude of space money and material aggrandisement occupy in such pastors' sermons could make a biblical Christian wonder if the content of the Holy Bible has been changed and they were just yet to get the memo. So much talks, so much focus and harping by these sophisticated pastors on tithing and offerings such that a great number of churchgoers today never really hear the gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by the Lord Himself and our earliest brothers the apostles. Again, when one witnesses how fluent and cajoling – how impressive and convincing – how eloquent and oratorical some pastors get when they are trying to raise funds for their ministries; or when they are just trying to inspire their congregation to go out and make more money for themselves and their family, or even "for God", one could easily think it is not a pastor preaching but that perhaps the church authority had invited an investment banker to come educate the congregation on how to invest in real estate or something. And yes by the way, churches do that now: invite lost people to mount their pulpits and speak to the sheep of Christ. Then these lost people, God hating and bible ignorant individuals in the name of professionals, come in and enlighten the people on how to give their lives to pursuing and acquiring everything God hates. They "talk God" and patronise Him a lot, but really, their God is their belly and their doctrines are nothing but the latest trends and nicely packaged dung of the business world. They misquote scriptures like: it is better to give (money) than to receive; cast your bread (money) upon the waters and get it back increased after many days; he that sows (money) sparingly will reap sparingly; the cattle on a thousand hills belongs God (So what?! Did God say you should go and pack them into your house?); it is God's will for you to prosper (so go out and make more money); you shall be the head and not the tail; you should

not allow unbelievers to be richer than you, so go and become billionaires; amongst others things they say. And these professionals just go on dishing out perverted scriptures to the people to support their pretence. The result is the mass production of impostors who parade themselves as Christians but who are actually unregenerate greedy and self-serving men and women who are all about having their best life now and seeking to use God rather than be used of God. I tell you, disagree if you like, but most churchgoers were doomed the day preachers became business proponents rather than announcers of the quietening great day of the Lord. But what said the Spirit by the mouth of the prophet Enoch? Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints. And the psalmist picked up the song and said, "Yes He cometh to judge the earth". And the prophet Isaiah raised the echo saying, "Indeed the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; and shall destroy sinner from the surface of the earth". And then when John the Baptist came he reacted, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand! Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His path straight! Bring forth fruits meet for repentance!" But you see, your preachers today have deleted the repentance chorus and that is why the churches are "full and happy" – no friction! Because when there is no judgement day in view, then there is no need for repentance. And when there is no need for repentance, then even the unrepentant sinner will muster just enough strength to be nice and religious enough to be church-worthy. Oh, men of God ought to wail and fast over this unfortunate state of their Christendom! Amen.

Beloved, you are not a peddler of God's word for monetary or material gain (2Corinthians 2:17; Micah 3:11 - 12). The thought must not even be tolerated much less negotiated with in your mind – if it comes, you cast it down back to hell from where it came! (2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Deuteronomy 7:1-5). God has not called you to the pulpit (if indeed He has called you) to amass earthly fortune but to make a living; not to make a name for

yourself but to proclaim the name of the Lord to a generation deafened by sin and self; not to raise worshippers of yourself but to raise true and spirit-filled worshippers of Jehovah. The Lord told Peter and His brother Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Who else, other than Brother Peter, should have built an empire of fish business and possibly called it "The Mediterranean Apostolic Fish Syndicate" just to add a religious feel to it, you know, and maybe even give free fish to members on Sundays? Or who else, other than Brother Paul, should have established a multimillion denary tent making dynasty and probably named it "The Arabian Tents and Gospel Global Outreach", and maybe sell the tents to Christians at a discount, or even fund a charity organisation on the side? But no, these holy men of God who understood their calling said they would rather give themselves to fervent prayer and the preaching of the pure and glorious gospel (Acts 6:4). And while some of those tested and certified men of God of Bible times worked secular jobs, it was with them a matter of necessity and not flamboyant ambition. All these modern preachers with their insatiable ambitions to purchase numberless luxurious toys and building structures – men who go about building their personal empires on the bones of saved and unsaved souls in the name of Christ and ministry – men who, under normal circumstance, should have no business preaching because they are ignorant of the truth of God supposing that wealth accumulation equals godliness (1Timothy 6:5); and they ceaselessly perverts the scriptures damning souls to hell every other day. I once heard a popular pastor based in Port Harcourt, Nigeria preach on the ten virgins from Matthew chapter 25. I was bewildered to hear him "magically" make such a parable of purity and spiritual vigilance to be about financial prosperity. He went on to say that the five foolish virgins teach us that one can be very holy and still be very foolish (by not being financially prosperous). What an aberration! What a murderous marriage of God's unique nature with man's common nature! Do you see how these charlatans and thieves come in through the window to rape the sheep?

They care nothing for the souls of men. They care nothing for the eternal destination of their congregations. They may think they do, but their practises shouts the contrary. And yet, the Master has said that gaining the soul and not this world is the goal (Mark 8:36-37). But these preachers are all about this life and are destitute of hope for the kingdom of heaven. They stuff themselves with every material thing they can get and encourage their congregations to do the same (Luke 12:15). They rarely preach holiness and even when they do, they find a way to make it about financial advancement.

But thus says the Lord, even I who shall judge the quick and the dead. Yea, I the Holy Judge of men and of angels, I shall come for you and I shall not tarry to give you the measure of your works in full.

Beloved, your call is a holy call! It is a divinely managed profession – a profession that carries the power of God by the virtue of stable connection with divine supply. But alas, many that parade themselves as preachers today deny this power by the way they live (2Timothy 3:5).

Understand what is most important and pursue it with everything you have got (Revelations 3:15-18; 1Timothy 6:6-9; Hebrews 12:14).

NOT A COMEDIAN

Strange enough, we live in the times when the people are gradually disillusioned with sophisticated modern life as they realise that, in spite of all efforts to get on board the fast train of globalisation and technological advancement, true peace and happiness remain elusive. But instead for the people of the world to turn to God and His living Word for true joy, they take to comical works and presentations which, by the way, are mostly sacrilegious as they either blatantly promote ungodliness or simply undermine the principles and judgements of the Holy

God who is sanctified forevermore. Amen. Of course, one would expect that the churches will be wiser than the world in this matter. But alas, some pastors have reduced themselves to virtual promoters of clowns by inviting and paying comedians to mount the pulpit and spew all sorts of folly before the Lord of glory (Malachi 1:6-7). And all these trespasses my people commit in the name of being seeker-friendly congregations, says the Lord.

To start with, many of the popular comedians are unregenerate people who, by and large, have little or no regard for the authority of God's word as exemplified in the lives they lead and in the manner of their conversations. How then can they be allowed to mount the pulpit and address the saints whom are sanctified by the precious blood of Christ? Have we not heard these comedians tell jokes that trample upon the blood with which we have been redeemed? We hear jokes like, I paraphrase, "...people called the blood so much that the blood was exhausted". What insult on the Holy Spirit who continues to spread the power of the blood around the hearts of God's people (Romans 3:25-26; 5:5-6)! Oh my dear brethren, even the dead religions of this world reverend their idols which are altogether false. But my people know not my worth to reverence my sanctuary and they fondle with fire.

Beloved, God cannot be mocked - not subtly, and definitely not unabashedly! And no one will be held unaccountable who trivialises the calling of God. For every man shall answer for every idle (careless/empty/worthless) word he speaks on the day of judgement. Indeed, the words of your mouth will be one of the parameters with which you will be justified or condemned (Matthew 12:36-37). Now, I am not saying pastors, or every Christian for that matter, should go about looking melancholic and so morose all the time. Neither am I saying that preachers should preach at their pulpit always sombrelly (even though I reckon that they probably would when they understand the

gravity of the truth of the gospel vis-a-vis the impenitent heart of most of their congregation). In any case, the word of God readily gives us to: rejoice evermore (1Thessalonians 5:16); neither be ye sorry (grieved/perplexed/dejected), for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10); rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice (Philippians 4:4). But do you see? The saints' joy is in the Lord. Now, the Lord and the Spirit are one (2Corinthians 3:17). Hence, the Bride of Christ is given to know that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). In essence, the Christian life exists within the heart of the Holy Spirit where no iniquity survives (Galatians 5:16; 1 John 3:6; John 15:4; 1 John 2:6). And yet, how many of our so-called innocent jokes are flesh-generated.

One might well find that everyone (including the so-called sadist) has a sense of humour, and we all feel the urge to banter every now and then. But many a time, in the quest to be funny enough to get a laugh out of our audience, we tend to inflate the truth (2Samuel 1:1-16), or tell outright lies (Proverbs 6:16-19), or flatter (Proverbs 29:5), or even talk down at God and on people (Ephesians 4:29). For any preacher who feels the need to always tell one or two jokes to his congregation, sin is inevitable because a manipulation of the truth here and there makes one a habitual liar. The preaching of the gospel of Christ is a very sober profession as it is literally the matter of life and death. Therefore, it is rather wise for every man carrying this sacred call to shun all frivolous talks lest they unwittingly trivialize the truth of God. When a congregation have heard divine commands mixed together with jokes so many times, then they gradually become unable to separate the sacred from the common.

Saints upon whom the end of the world has come, remember that the house of God is a house of prayer – not the house of debauchery, or scorn or calumny; neither is it a house for profiteers to have their fill (Matthew 21:13; Isaiah 56:7; Leviticus 19:30).

There is indeed no overemphasising the matter of tongue control. The word of God harps on the tune across countless scriptural texts: death and life is in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21); for he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile (1 Peter 3:10); let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (Colossians 4:6); sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues (Proverbs 10:19); the soothing tongue is a tree of life, but the perverse tongue crushes the spirit (Proverbs 15:4); the heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil (Proverbs 15:28); not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man (Matthew 15:11); those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity (Proverbs 21:23); set a guard over my mouth LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3), and so on. Every child of God should understand that though the tongue is a small organ of the body, it nonetheless wields incredible power. On this note, all they who name the name of the Lord must conquer, seize and place their tongues under the absolute control of the Holy Ghost.

NOT A PHILOSOPHER/PSYCHOLOGIST

Since the earliest history of man, some thoughtful men, after realising the pervasive corruption of humanity as well as its need to get right with divine justice, have embarked on numerous soul-searching enterprises. These outstanding men have successfully come up with moral codes for humanity to live by and have even gone on from there to establish religions with fantastic principles for their adherents to live by. These men of reasoning have been labelled philosophers and their wise sayings and conjectures, philosophy. One would however agree that every man is fallible and our wisest deductions, summations, theses and promulgations are open to immediate

or/and future reviews and corrections. In fact, scientific and non-scientific opinions change almost every other year. Researchers return with new researches supported with "tested and trusted statistics". One year the doctors are telling us to eat banana because it is good for us, the next year we are told to run from banana and pursue mangoes. Our methodologies for living are as varied as our writers. We are always hearing about things like "new unique 15 unique ways to make marriage work", for instance, and yet, these same writers/solution-providers return to us with ever increasing statistics of broken homes. A simple man like me has to wonder: do our thinkers even think? So we develop new solutions by the second but our problems never go away, and instead of turning to God and His word, most of us just take to whatever way is pleasing to us. Consequently, all man-made philosophies are relative truths to which there are alternatives which any man may conveniently subscribe to. But this is not so with God's laws! The word of God is yea and amen (2Corinthian 1:20). In other words, God's way is wholesome and completely true.

Therefore, a preacher of the ordinances of God is not putting forward human philosophies or principles that may be negotiated over or even compromised. A pastor should not be found suggesting alternatives to God's commands. It is either God's word or sin; it is either life or death; it is either God or self - there is no middle ground. There is no acceptable option as regards any matter so long such an option contradicts the known will of God whether as revealed by the written word or a personal revelation by the hand of the Holy Spirit. (And in any case, no personal revelation by the Spirit will contravene the Holy Scriptures. For Jesus has said "...when he, the Spirit of truth, is come..., He shall receive of mine [the Word] and shall shew it to you"). The provisions of the Holy Scriptures are complete, faultless, immutable and potent in themselves (Psalms 12:6; 19:7-11). Biblical doctrines on God's nature and His universal will for humanity may not be annulled by any new

revelation even if the revelation were by an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:8).

The foregoing counsel is pertinent in view of the emergence of professional Psychology in Christian ministry in modern times. Nowadays in some churches, worship feels like an encounter with a psychologist or even a hypnotist. Alas! Plato, Socrates, Confucius, Machiavelli and even Robert Greene now pastor most congregations. Scriptures are twisted, or at least watered down, to either further the personal interests of the preacher or to caress the emotions and ego of the congregation. Some preachers even completely ignore the reality of heaven and hell in the name of God's love and grace, forgetting that God's nature of love does not nullify but rather complements His nature of justice; and that His grace does not imply the tolerance of sin but an opportunity for sinners to repent forthwith from all their wickedness before the day of His righteous judgement (Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13; Hosea 4:6;).

Psychology of course is basically about man trying to understand man. It is supposed to help man study his emotions and behaviours through human research – and that independent of God. The goal of a psychologist, more or less, is to peep into the soul of man in order to know what he feels, how he feels and how his feelings can be improved to make his existence more comfortable – and all those are to be achieved through interviews and observation using just the physical senses. In other words one man, with his limited mind, would search out another man's heart – a heart which the Bible says is very dark and deceitful, and which God uses His spiritual candle to search (Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 20:27). But we know that no one can know the content of another man's heart except it is revealed to them by spirit (2Corinthians 2:11). Even a man may yet find his own heart elusive to him. Could Psychology, then, possibly help blind carnal humankind to unilaterally study the inner man with a view to transforming and even saving him –

and that without the help of God's word? Whereas, the truth is that it takes the same Spirit of power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead to regenerate and save every man through faith in the Living Word of God. For the word of God is alive and powerful – sharper than any two-edged sword because it can penetrate the whole being of a man, discerning even his most hidden thoughts and intentions (Romans 8:11; John 6:63; Hebrew 4:12).

Now, it is the painful reality of many Christian denominations in these last days that their pastors who have lost touch with the potency of God's word subscribe to Psychology instead. Such pastors feel the need to make the gospel more "appealing". They decide to substitute the spirituality of God's word and the operation of the Holy Spirit with numerous physical, intellectual, social, medical and economic activities to grow their churches. So they, wittingly or unwittingly, lower God's standard so that their Christianity can be conducive for unrepentant sinners. In the name of seeker-friendliness, some preachers now consult modern day mediums of public polls so that they can conform to popular opinions and be also fashionable. Such ministries forget that that which is esteemed among men is mostly an abomination with God (Luke 16:15; Isaiah 8:19 – 20). But the true sheep know that the Good Shepherd will not lower His standard. Rather, it is mankind that must step up by accepting Jesus and repenting from all unrighteousness.

What?! My ears are open! Tell me now what injustice you have discovered in my laws that you have strayed far away from them; and that you now preach nothing and you yourselves have become nothing, says the Lord?

Also dear pastor (or would be pastor), you are not a motivational speaker. You have not been called to sweet-talk people. You are not here to make your audience feel better about themselves to the end that they remain comfortable in their ungodliness. The

reason you have to do so much motivational speaking in your church is simply because you have too little or no power of the Holy Ghost. And you are not an activist either. There can be "Christian activism" in the world today only because some preachers have left off the preaching of the gospel to say and to do other things that the Lord has not sent them. So, preach the truth of the gospel of Christ in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2).

Again Mr. Preacher, you are not here to build monstrous houses "for God" (Isaiah 66:1-2). When one considers the quantity of material things some so-called preachers have gathered, one cannot help but ask, "Do these preachers even remember the day when they will sleep and not wake up again leaving all these riches behind?" Yet, when one honestly considers the life of Paul the apostle for instance, one will have to define an healthy Christian as a person who is ultimately eager to go and be with the Lord in the land of light and love, but yet willing to stay in this land of sin and woe for as long as his Lord wants him here. Beloved preachers, instead of building physical estates, let us labour to prayerfully build godly men who will be used of God rather than a sea of ungodly people who just want to use God to achieve their selfish goals and ambitions. Oh we are so unlike our fathers the holy prophets who were so preoccupied with God that they moved their generations for God. John the Baptist never raised buildings – he was practically homeless living in the desert. But glory to God because that Voice crying in the wilderness raised a dead generation. Alleluia!

Pastor, you are certainly not here to build an empire for yourself in the name of a large ministry. You are here to serve the Lord your God who is holy and before whom you will give account for every deed done in the flesh. You are here to convince and convict saints and sinners alike of their errors so that all may turn and walk in the one and only way the Creator has set out for His creation – and Christ is that way (John 16:8). Pastor you are

here to relay and repeat the will of God for the people to the people until you die or until you wear the people out and they have no choice but to forsake their own ways because the Spirit of God has begun working on their minds.

CHAPTER 2

WHO YOU REALLY ARE

Apostle Paul, addressing all saints, writes: "...we are not of them who draw back unto perdition..." (Hebrews 10:39). Again he writes: "I trust that ye know that we are not reprobates" (2Corinthians 13:6). In the above cited scriptures the apostle highlighted the fact that all those who are born of God know that their new nature in Christ is that of enduring godliness. Now, if the led sheep know their calling in Christ, shall not the leading sheep more so?

A BONDSMAN OF CHRIST

In the opening of his epistle to the Romans, Brother Paul describes himself as being a servant of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1). The word translated as servant there is the Greek word "doulos" which simply means bond-slave. A bond-slave in the times of the apostle was someone who was entirely the property of another. So then, a bond-slave of Christ is entirely the property of Christ. But what is the implication of being the bond-slave of Christ? To grasp the concept of being a bondman of Christ, one must understand the concept of slavery as conceived by the peoples of ancient times.

To be a slave in the ancient world was to possess no self-worth and to embrace whatever kind of life the master decided for one. It has already been mentioned above that a bond slave is a person entirely owned by another. That means that property law applied to slaves making them assume the status of an inanimate object which has no self-will. A slave did not have personal ambitions but lived everyday of his life for the pleasure of the master. It goes without saying then that the bondsman of Christ is necessarily dead to the pleasures of the world but alive

for the Lord's pleasure only. He has lost his will inside the will of Christ and so is increasingly unable to desire anything for himself but for the glory of the One who bought him with His blood. But how does this concept apply in reality for the Christian preacher or minister?

BONDSMAN MEANS CHRIST ABOVE EARTHLY RICHES

"Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospereth". Those were the words of John the Apostle to Gaius and, by implication, every child of God who cares to read the Third Epistle of John. The Greek word translated as prosper here is euodoo. Euodoo is made up of two root words, eu, which means "good" and hodos, which means "road, or route, or a progress or journey". So, we could say that Euodoo has a connotation of satisfaction derived from arriving at the desired destination with regards to a given affair. The word is also used in Romans 1:10 where Brother Paul prays that he may have a prosperous journey to Rome. Now, except we want to infer from that text that Apostle Paul was planning to go and make some cool cash in Rome, then we cannot interpret "prosper" in 3 John: 2 as necessarily referring to earthly riches. In any case, this Apostle John's expression could as well be the equivalent of how a modern man would open his letter saying something like, "I hope my letter meets you well!" or "I trust that all has been well with you!" or something of such.

I believe that the rich in this world can be, and indeed have been converted to Christ. I also believe there are Christians who inherit wealth. And I believe that God might even throw some riches your way even as a Christian. However, the reality of practicing biblical Christianity makes it virtually impossible to maintain a rich status, never mind being preoccupied with the pursuit of riches. I mean, if you are going to make money in a

godly way and also be willing to give to the needy (keeping in mind there will always be the needy), then it just might prove difficult to maintain the status of the rich (Matthew 26:11; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).

For a preacher especially, concentrating one's effort on amassing money or material possessions is a symptom of corruption of the faith and a deviation from the apostolic vision. In practice, the arithmetic of the Christian faith hardly results into a rich lifestyle. Money ought to be nothing more than a necessity to a Christian and not something they want to build their lives around. This is true because, all of the self-dependence and showiness which normally travel with riches are the very things the cross of Christ crucifies. And in any case, the essence of sin is self-reliance and self exaltation. But the configuration of the new life in Christ is such that each believer's earthly days, in different degrees howbeit, are divinely orchestrated to detoxify him of every drop of human strength and wisdom in order to keep him ever looking up to God for sustenance – even as it was with our elder brother Jesus who surrendered His omnipotence and His omniscience so that He became completely dependent on whatever the Holy Spirit provided for Him. That is the great goal of God for each believer – to be conformed to image of Christ (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 2:5-8)! If the abundance of gold and silver makes the kingdom of God more elusive to man, then common sense requires the Christian to be least passionate about getting rich (Proverbs 23:4; Mark 10:25).

The Master commands us to seek first the kingdom of God while keeping in mind that this kingdom cannot be detached from righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Now, the reality of the pursuit of earthly riches is that it hardly complies with the righteousness of God. In fact, to make wealth in the world today more often than never requires compromising God's laws here and there - disagree if you like, but the tabloids and your conscience will

always betray you. Do not the banks steal from you every now and then? Do not the telecommunication companies pull one over on you sometimes? Do we not know that it often takes inflation of the truth or even outright lies to advertise a product in the media? And entertainment shows around the world, like the Big Brother franchise for instance, clearly points to where the heads of most of the so-called business moguls are - in the dustbin, that's where! And so, we call those who proudly flout the laws of God successful and role models; and we praise fraudsters and murderers as blessings to family and society (Malachi 3:15). But let us get back to the life of the preacher and see what the scriptures say about him with regards to money.

God's people are pilgrims in this world. Pilgrims never have the luxury of dwelling long enough to establish empires. The money preacher talks money all the time because he dwells long on the thoughts of accumulating earthly riches. And man focuses on what he loves. But the scriptures say the love of money is the root of all evil because somehow, you eventually find yourself kissing the feet of what you love (1 Timothy 6:10; Luke 7:44-47). And if what you are reading now angers you, it is because you love money, whether you realise it or not. But that is okay because this gospel also angered your fathers the covetous Pharisees whom the love of mammon pushed out of the way of salvation and into the sorrows of perdition (Luke 16:14; 1 Timothy 6:9-10). You really cannot go after God and Mammon at the same time. The madness of money religion has become so rabid that even young preachers just starting out readily imagine themselves someday having billions of money, owning fleet of cars and erecting colossal church structures when they have not even completed the task of making their first convert. Do you see? Look at what we have become – a materialistic generation! And do not say “but the so-called fathers at the top are rich and spiritual, and they are evidently serving the Lord”. Well yes they are, or at least it appears so. But are they being Christ-like? Remember Eli was out of favour with God but still

retained his religious cum social status. The problem of my people is that they too often confuse "religious" for "spiritual". The question is: do these prosperity and luxury preachers bear any semblance to Jesus? Look at the kind of filthily materialistic generations their ministries breed! And we know the myriads of blasphemy and offences that the unbelievers fling at the name of the blessed Lord because of the lifestyles of these preachers. Whereas, scriptures say that in nothing should we give offence for the gospel's sake and that we ought to be blameless before all men (2Corinthians 6:3). This strange form of Christianity which accommodates the piling up of material possessions - from whom and from where do its promulgators learn it? It is certainly not from Christ. Christ's teaching was: sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth (Luke 12:33). But the problem of this covetous generation is not even "not selling", is it? Because almost everything in our churches today is for sale!

The word of the Lord to this generation is: Return, return o idolatrous and lustful generation. For your gods are silver and gold; and you run lustfully after Mammon until you perish in her bed, says the Lord.

How many preachers today are content with God alone? Oh we just love Christ... plus a few cars, plus one or two mansions. Let me ask you reader. If God appeared to you today like He did to Solomon and He sets two options before you: an international ministry characterised with a huge possession of money, building of large auditoriums, Christian universities and hospitals as well as unending well-advertised intercontinental crusades; or a solemn ministry in one obscure town but the ministry is characterised with deep and intimate fellowship with God and in which God supplies your exact needs without putting even a penny in your hand. What would your choice be, brother? Preacher, lovest thou me more than these?

Indeed, your journey as a servant of God in this generation will be punctuated with the world taunting you incessantly to descend from the mountain of godliness and contentment to come down into the valley of covetousness and satanic luxury. Go down if you like, but you shall find nothing but emptiness and spiritual waste. O you my people take riches or lay hold on the Spirit. But you shall not have both! And they that know their God shall flee for their lives and such shall be saved.

Say not in your heart, "I have this or that general overseer or prophet as my father". For there is but one Father of all, and one Lord over all even Jesus Christ before whom both the evangelist and the evangelised shall stand to give account. It is not all who say unto me Lord, Lord that will inherit my Kingdom, says the Lord. Let those who have ears hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

BONDSMAN MEANS CHRIST ABOVE SELF

See, Christianity is more of dying than living. Dying to self is the goal. The scriptures tell us Samson slew more enemies of God at his dying than in his living. Why? Because he that is dead is freed from sin (Romans 6:7). Self is crucified that Christ may live in us; we are emptied of self to be filled with God the Holy Spirit; and we are stripped of self in order to be clothed with Christ. Why? Because self is flesh and God never anoints the flesh (Exodus 30:22 - 32). Notice that in Psalm 133 verse 2 the anointing oil ran down from Aaron's head to his beards and then to his clothes, bypassing his flesh. God and the flesh are sworn enemies. To anoint the flesh is to empower it and licence its work - God would never do that! So, it is nonnegotiable as well as imperative for anyone that would serve our Lord in spirit and in truth to embrace the phenomenon of the demise of self-love, selfishness, self glory, self honour, self-centredness, self monetization, self importance, self promotion, self idolising, self

obsession and all other “selfisms” which now devour the little sanity our world had left, and which unfortunately have set their fangs into the body of Christ.

ON SELF-ESTEEM

But what about self-esteem, could we have that? Yes but not a high or a low self esteem. It should be a “no self-esteem” – that was the type Jesus our elder brother had. With this kind of self esteem, you are so bold that you would face up to the highest Pharisee and call him what he was to his face – a hypocrite; and at the same time you are so gentle that you would not lose your temper even when you are being beaten and spat upon. You are so hot for God that you cannot indulge sin, and you are so cold for the sake of Christ that neither spite nor humiliation can set you off. This kind of self-esteem confuses the world. In fact, it is not self-esteem but Christ-esteem. So we are back to square one, aren't we? No self at all!

MINISTRY AND SELF

It is evident truth that many preachers today have carelessly withdrawn themselves from the Lord Jesus Christ only to give themselves to (their) ministry. You say what is wrong with being given over to ministry? Nothing, until it takes the place of Christ. The fire never descends on the altar (your ministry) but on the sacrifice (your crucified self). Ministry is the gift of God and it is a good thing as long as it does not come between you and the Giver. Ministry can quickly become all about self. And ministry can be growing financially and even numerically but full of spiritually dead people. But Christ ought to fill your ministry. And a Christ-filled ministry is one controlled and dictated by the Holy Spirit. You cannot be in the driver's seat while Jesus sits in the passenger's seat or in the back seat or even completely out of the vehicle – no! You do not even know where you are going

because the vision is God's in the first place (James 4:14-15; Matthew 6:34). Hence, like that prophet of old, you are vigilant and always watching to see what next the Lord will say unto you (Habakkuk 2:1). That is why it is so pathetic to hear some preachers pride themselves in how they are already booked for the "next several months" to minister at this or that conference or crusade or concert. For crying out loud, where is the room for the Holy Spirit to interrupt our "well-planned" lives? Are we interested in the Holy Ghost interrupting our day like He did with Brother Peter on that housetop while he was waiting for food (Acts 10:10)? Or like the Holy Spirit, in Acts 16:6-10, kept interrupting Brother Paul's ministry to send Him to Macedonia – do we want that or are we too busy to be bothered by the Lord? Mathias, Mathias, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful, which is to be ready to sit and listen to the Master and to enjoy private fellowship with Him. Many have jettisoned that divine fellowship for endless public appearances and religious functions. The truth is that it is easy, even thrilling perhaps, to fly about attending Christian conferences, or speaking at endless seminars or even organising myriads of open-air crusades. Why? Because all those can be done with the power of the flesh – you do not always need God for those. In fact, you can do all those religious exercises to impress self and pretend it is for God. But to settle down long and be still alone before the Lord requires humility and godly endurance - both which only come about by the awareness of one's helplessness and hopelessness in the absence of the power of God. Some of our many religious activities can be good and should be encouraged when they are honestly aimed at glorifying the cross of Christ. We must therefore pause every now and then to assess ourselves as to whether or not our availability for all the many activities makes us unavailable to the Lord or even to our spouses and children. Is the ministry thriving at the expense of your personal prayer altar or even at the expense of your marriage? Are you sacrificing your children on the altar of ministry expansion?

Family, just like ministry, is a gift from God which must not suffer neglect. You should not be robbing one to pay the other. Family is, in fact, another ministry on its own.

BONDSMAN AND THE SHEEP

Remember this, o pastor, that even though God has placed you over His fold, you yourself are first a sheep just as every other believer. So, then, you are more of a leading-sheep than a shepherd. You really have not been called to do anything too different than what every other Christian has been called to do. Your calling is to lead others in serving Christ - you are a lead-servant. Therefore, be mindful not to impose yourself on the people but rather, be a remarkable example of the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2Corinthians 10:1). You are to serve in such a manner that the sheep in your care will learn how to serve God in you. God did not choose you to lead His people because you have any intrinsic worth or because you are the best. If anything, we know that God chooses the lower things of this world to confound the high ones, and He empowers the weaker things to confound the strong. So pastor, you will do well to esteem others above yourself.

The Lord Jesus Christ who is the True and Great Shepherd has said that the true shepherd gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Notice the emphasis on the word "for". The true shepherd gives his life for the sheep but not to the sheep. This is because the true shepherd pours out his life unto God. God is the initiator and judge of the shepherd's sacrifice. The implication of this is that you, as the leader of God's people, must dance only to God's tune: it is He who calls the shots! The servant of God must labour to please God rather than the sheep. A pastor who is particularly concerned with keeping his congregation happy at the expense of God's ordinances is an epic failure (Galatians 1:10). Likewise, a minister who is preoccupied with staying relevant to the popular world culture is

ignorant as to the nature of his calling. And any ministry desperate about increasing its membership will undoubtedly have to compromise with the standard of God's laws in order to accommodate the nonsense of an unfiltered crowd. But a man of God must fearlessly pursue to know "thus saith the Lord" and be content - the multitude can walk away if they like. Remember, if they go from us it is because they were never for us in the first place (1John 2:19).

As a leader, the pastor is the sight and intelligence of the lot of sheep which the True Shepherd has placed in his care. Left to themselves and without the guidance of God's word, the sheep are bound to stray. Unfortunately, majority of the shepherds around these days are blind watchmen who love to sleep and slumber; and they are dump dogs who cannot bark (Isaiah 56:10). In fact, some pastors today have their sermon looking like an interactive session or a round table discussion. In the bid to make their ministry sophisticated and inclusive, such ministers design their sermon to look like teamwork where everyone chips in an opinion on what should be or should not be. Whatever happened to "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"? Dear pastor, if Christ wanted you to be an opinion collector, He would have simply made you a suggestion box and hanged you at the entrance of the church instead of making you His mouthpiece and setting you in front of the people to speak His mind with the intelligence of His Spirit.

Another counsel of the Lord to you little shepherd is: lay hand on no man suddenly. Never assume that everyone joining your congregation or even professing Christ is genuinely for Christ. But examine everyone carefully and patiently in the light of the scriptures, and let the multitude of years of tests and trials separate the sheep from the goats. Otherwise, you will end up giving church responsibilities to hypocrites or even demons. Also, you are not permitted by God to ordain or appoint people to any post because of their social status. Neither should you

pity-appoint people. What I mean by “pity-appoint” is the habit of some clergymen appointing people to church offices just to encourage them to grow in grace over time. Well, pity-appointment is unbiblical. The apostolic church in the Book of Acts appointed people to church offices because they were full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, not so that they can be filled with faith and the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:3 - 5). In fact, people joined the early church because they had been converted rather than because they wanted to be converted. But what shall we do with modern Christianity which wants to accommodate everybody?

THE BONDSMAN AND THE WORD

It is true that God wants His people who He has redeemed from the land of bondage to eat the milk of the land of liberty, but that milk must be the sincere milk. The fact that even the so-called baby-converts may only consume the sincere and undiluted word of God is clear from scriptures. Woe unto pastors who short-change the sheep by handing out half truths or a gospel reduced to materialism. They are like a man who was trained and fed with balanced diet by his own father until he grew to be strong and healthy. But when he becomes a father, he underfeeds and even starves his children. What an immoral and derelict father!

The Bible contains the perfect word of God but not all of the word of God. Truly, the word of God spills over beyond the front and back covers of the Bible but not beyond the divinely set borders of the scriptures. What that means is that the letters may vary between the scriptural content of the Bible and the scriptural content from outside the Bible, but the spirit of the scriptures is always one – one in purpose. And that purpose is this: making God in Christ the focus of all things and the main goal of every created being. Since God has not stopped making His men, then He definitely has not stopped speaking to His men – because the Deep will always call to the deep. And if God has

not stopped speaking to His men, then scriptures continue to be written, or at least further expatiated. Therefore, whenever any man of God opens his mouth to speak forth spiritual truth from his Holy Ghost sanctified mind, he will naturally speak scriptures. Remember, today's scriptures were yesterday's words of the Lord in the mouth of His men. However, because any one can just speak forth the foolishness of their heart and label it the word of God, the Spirit of the Lord readily outlines the essential parameters with which God's children may and should judge every word.

PARAMETERS TO JUDGE THE WORD

I shall immediately highlight these parameters in the form of questions, and their answers shall be as the Holy Ghost gives this writer light.

1. WHO IS THE CONDUIT OF THIS SO-CALLED WORD FROM GOD?

The first parameter is that which scrutinizes the person of the messenger. Is this person of God? As seen in Brother Paul's experience with the possessed damsel in Philippi, it is not enough to speak forth a spiritual truth (Acts 16: 16 – 18; Deuteronomy 13: 1 - 3). Whoever shall speak forth a spiritual truth worthy of scripture-hood must first fulfil the preconditions of a man of God. The man of God is he who has had to throw away the sandals of his own ways in the burning bush somewhere along the mountain side on his way to the top of Sinai to see God. And by the time he arrived at the top of Sinai, he had dissipated the strength of his depraved human nature through the divinely orchestrated exhaustion of climbing the mountain, and he has now put on the patience and meekness of Christ in whom God is perfectly pleased. There is really only one man of God – the man Jesus of Nazareth. Every other person can only be a man of God by becoming a photocopy of Christ. A

man of God, then, must be holy, lowly and frank – just like Jesus. So, the summary of the matter is this: a man of God is that person who is full of Christ, and only such a man may speak forth scriptures; listen to him (Luke 9:7; 1John 4:17).

2. DOES THIS SO-CALLED WORD FROM GOD CONTRADICT THE MESSAGE OF THE CANONIZED SCRIPTURES?

You will not always find explicit precedent in the Bible to corroborate every inspired utterance in the mouth of a man of God. We might as well be sincere about that because we must protect ourselves against legalism and rigid referencing, both which are blind to the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. However, no inspired utterance will contradict or invalidate the doctrines of Jesus Christ (I say “the doctrines of Christ” because all the lessons and teachings of the whole Bible climax in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ). If anything, an inspired utterance cut from the mind of God and worthy of scripture-hood will rather illuminate the written scriptures or reveal further truths we do not already have in written form. The Spirit of God who moved holy men of God in old times to both speak and write the scriptures now contained in the Bible is the one and same Holy Spirit working in the holy men of God of this present time. Therefore, our judgment of inspired utterances should not be that of comparing and contrasting words or letters, but rather that of discerning spirits under the telescope of Divine purpose(s) already revealed in the Holy Bible. If the spirit behind an inspired utterance seems to be pushing an agenda different from the ones God has in the Bible, then there is a foul play and caution is needed.

3. WHAT AGENDA DOES THIS SO-CALLED WORD FROM GOD FURTHER?

Every spirit has an agenda, and by their agenda you shall know them. The agenda of the Holy Spirit, as far as earthly life is concerned, is to conform a man to the image of Jesus Christ who Himself is the express image of the invisible God. Hence, the Holy Spirit always makes much of Christ. In other words, Christ is invariably exalted whenever the Holy Ghost is at work. And that is why all of scriptures (Genesis to Revelations) points to Christ: the Laws and the Prophets predicted the coming of Christ, while the apostles witnessed the coming - because the same Holy Spirit was at work in all those saints (2Peter 1:21; 2Timothy 3:16). It goes without saying then that any so-called inspired-utterance or sermon that undermines the person of Christ or that is disenchanted with the crucified life comes from an unclean spirit. Unfortunately, many so-called Christian speakers today are channels/victims of demons' doctrines. Very few preachers would speak unfavourably of Christ, but very many of the sermons coming out of the pulpits today seduce people away from a life of self-denial and of carrying one's cross in the footstep of Christ. Preachers as well as ministries that focus on motivating people to get all the best things this life has to offer are the enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:17-20). A life of luxury was never designed for the preachers of the gospel, and a true follower of Christ would hardly be concerned with acquiring the best of the things this life has to offer. So then, the sermons of the Christian preacher must inspire the listeners to covet the life of Christ Jesus and to look for His return.

BONDSMAN AND PRAYER

I know a man in Christ to whom an angel of the Lord said in a night vision, "You call that man (referring to another man) a pastor - a man who does not pray?" A man who does not pray is

no man of God. The scripture says to pray without retreating. Christ says man should pray all the time and never be lazy to pray. The prayer of a child of God forms into a staff which he carries about with him. And of course, a staff is useful for support when walking or climbing the stairs. So how then can a man of God walk the walk of faith without a life of prayer?

Leonard Ravenhill wrote, "He who stops praying starts sinning; and he who starts praying stops sinning". Jesus, who carried all the fullness of God and lacking nothing, prayed fervently and prayed anytime and anywhere and anyhow (Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7; Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 23:34). Would it then not be treasonably absurd for any so-called Christian to trifle with prayer? Below are a few things you should know about true prayer.

True prayer can only be said with the knowledge of the word of God. Most people pray amiss because they are ignorant. In fact, many have prayed themselves to hell because they prayed, not to get their needs met, but to get their wants gratified. Prayer is not a device used for manipulating God to grant your every wish. God occasionally allows Himself to be "manipulated" by some people's prayer but the result is usually disastrous (Number 11: 1-20; 1Samuel 8: 5-7; Hosea 13: 11). Prayer is really meant to pull the will of God into our physical realm of earth. Prayer is coming into God's presence by faith to claim the blessings He has already prepared for us (Psalm 65:9). He who truly ascends in the ministry of prayer will certainly find himself caught away from the cares of this world. Truly, the things of this dusty plane must grow strangely dim to him who abides in holy and lofty praying.

The prayer of the Spirit-filled believer mostly carries prophetic light as the Holy Ghost readily hijacks each prayer session to mention unknown needs of the believer(s) or to reveal the counsel of the Lord or even the secret programme of the enemy. True prayer is a training ground for the children of God. It is a

training ground where the fire of the Lord burns out the fats of pride, impatience and greed while the spiritual bones and muscles of faith are strengthened. Prayer is a place where the believer may learn holy endurance and determination.

True prayer is a battle. We only know when a battle starts but we cannot be certain of the duration of the battle until it has come to an end. So also, we can only know when true prayer begins but we cannot predict for certain how long or how short a prayer will last. This is why it is a joke when we put a time frame to our prayer sessions. When a spirit-filled Christian begins to pray, only the Spirit can tell for sure when the prayer will come to a close. It has been said that Apostle Ayo Babalola, for instance, would ask the brethren in his days to join him to have a "brief" prayer but amazingly, those "brief" prayers usually could last for as long as six hours – glory to God!

True prayer can only be prayed by the needy. Fervent prayer is the prerogative of the desperate. Just as we cannot expect a rich man to beg for food as a poor man would, so may we not expect a fellow who is ignorant of his spiritual wretchedness to pray as fervently as the poor in spirit would. The conceited and the complacent are usually too arrogant to come to the Lord.

True prayer is a vehicle that runs on the fuel of faith. Faith multiplies prayers, doubts decimate prayers. Because the word of God inspires faith and faith propels fervent prayer, prayer then is an evidence of faith in the word of God. And yes, true prayer works. The fervent prayer of the righteous will certainly receive answer or a loving rebuke from the all-knowing and most merciful Creator.

CHAPTER 3

YOUR ONLY TWO FRIENDS

As a servant of God, your only two friends are God's word and prayer.

CHAPTER 4

AMBASSADORS-IN-BONDS

I found it interesting to discover that the word ambassador was first used in the Scriptures and the word simply means servant or minister. In essence, an ambassador is a servant of someone greater than himself. Going further, an ambassador is a servant representing his master in the presence of another. Paul, addressing the Ephesians, called himself an ambassador in bonds for Christ.

POWER OF THE AMBASSADOR

An ambassador is generally unknown to the public in the land of his service as he does not enjoy much celebration or media publicity. However, in the circle of the powerful and influential, the ambassador is by no means a mean man. This is because the person as well as the words of an ambassador carries the same weight and authority as those of the Sovereign who he is representing in the foreign land. So also is the Christian ambassador an oracle of Christ and he is borne with the authority of heaven to bind and to loose on earth. An ambassador of Christ is not talkative but when he speaks, there is always a divine message from the Sovereign Lord of glory.

LETTER OF CREDENCE

A letter of credence is the formal letter of approval that appoints a diplomat as ambassador to another nation. It is addressed by the Sovereign of the home land to the Sovereign of the foreign land. For the ambassador of Christ in this world, the letter of credence is the power of the Holy Ghost which sustains him in a lifestyle of holiness, love and contentment, the three which may be summarised as the wisdom of God in man. Anyone who ventures into Christian ministry without the power of God would be a play-thing for the devils. An ambassador of Christ also must be above reproach always.

THE NOTIFICATION

When a man of God is born (and I speak here of the divine impartation of anointing and not natural birth), principalities and powers of different echelons of the darkness of this world are necessarily notified. Why? Because a city built on a hill cannot be hidden. Depending on his scope of influence, the ambassador of Christ is well known up to a certain level in the government of Satan. And by "scope of influence", we do not mean the physical or organizational size of your ministry. You could have an international ministry and be holding crusades every other month in different continents and still be a nonentity in the spheres of the spirits who matter. And you could be a pastor of a family-sized church of about ten members and yet constitute migraine to the kingdom of darkness. "Jesus I know, Paul I know; but who are ye?!" You see, this same Paul whose fame now rings through the ages was not very well-known to the people of his time and he enjoyed mostly little or no admiration at all from them (Galatians 1:21 – 23; 2 Corinthians 10:10). Yet the kingdom of darkness trembled at every advent of the apostle. Why? Because Paul carried a dagger-anointing and he knew where to stab it - the heart of the kingdom of darkness, that's where! The apostle was minded to only preach Christ crucified for the redemption of mankind from the dominion of sin and darkness into the marvellous and liberating kingdom of light run and governed by the exalted Son of God (1 Corinthians 1:22 -23; 2:2; Philippians 3:8 -10; 1 Timothy 3:16). Paul carried special anointing but he did not focus on the anointing but rather on the Giver of the anointing.

At the end of days, we will be shocked to find that most of the world famous preachers are nowhere near the list of God's generals but were rather nothing more than commandos who went AWOL by turning from following Christ the body to chase after shadows. I am reminded of the story of an old evangelist

long gone from this world but who in his hey days carried a great anointing for miracles. The

evangelist was also a prolific prophet, prophesying many things which came to pass. Sometime in his aged years when he could no longer run around to do many crusades and had become rather sedentary, it was at that point that he got a divine visitation that changed the outlook of the rest of his life. According to the old evangelist himself, the Lord appeared to him one night in His terrifying glory. And the Lord said something like this to the evangelist, "Son if you died now and I put your works to the fire, all of it will be nothing but straws and stubbles that will all burn up completely". You see, the good old evangelist had obviously left off from tracking down the Giver of the anointing and was only grabbling with the anointing. Beware preacher!

THE DECLARATION OF WAR

Next, after the kingdom of darkness has been notified of the advent of a man of God, is the declaration of war. The kingdom of this world readily declares every genuine ambassador of Christ persona non grata (unwanted person) and a bounty is even placed on their heads. The kingdom of darkness from then on spends great deal of resources to compromise the man of God. The forces of darkness would of course use whatever means necessary to achieve their goal. And those means include: sending much earthly riches in the direction of the man of God or bitterly fighting him with lack and poverty; preoccupying the man of God with so much administrative and socio-religious engagements with a view to putting out his fire; setting the man of God up with a wrong wife who is either demonic or just carnal enough to quench his spirit; injecting a child who is demonic, disabled or delinquent into the family of the man of God; fighting against his marriage with outright

barrenness, among other things. However, if the actualisation of the primary aim of compromising the man of God is not forthcoming, the forces of darkness are happy to settle for the secondary goal of killing his body to rid this fallen world of him. All forms of violence, corporal accidents and bodily ailments are means which the enemy may adopt to achieve this secondary goal. But glory to our sovereign King who is able to keep His own until the end of their missions!

THE OILNESS OF OUR AMBASSADORSHIP

The Master has said, "The kingdom of God is within you". If you are going to live as an ambassador of Christ in this world, then the kingdom of God must be within, around and all over you. In international law, there is what is called extraterritoriality which grants that while an ambassador physically lives and goes about his duty on the foreign soil, he is technically and legally in his home country. What this means is that the Nigerian ambassador to the United States, for instance, will be based in the United States but yet all the while he is there, the laws of the United States will not apply to him. As a matter of fact, an ambassador may not be arrested by the police of the host country neither may his residence be invaded nor his vehicles impounded by the host government, all other things being equal. The spiritual application for the ambassadors of Christ is the oiliness of Christian ambassadorship.

When oil drops in water, it lives on without mingling and without compromising its presence. The world system is water and the Christian ambassador is oil. As a servant of God you must always stand out. Do not be afraid of appearing strange to the people of the world. Your logic, if you are truly of God, will not always make sense to the world. You will love people and you will do whatever good you can for anyone that comes along, but frolicking with the sinful cultures of the world would amount to endangering your heavenly citizenship. In any case, the people

of the world are not exactly interested in fraternizing with you because most of the times they cannot even make sense of your faith. You see, a true ambassador speaks heavenly language (and I am not even referring to speaking in tongues here). Language could be defined as the window through which a group of people view the world. In other words, the language of each culture carries in it the values of its people and their perception of things as they exist in their consciousness. In essence, your language can only express what you know, or at least, believe exists. The implication of this to the Christian ambassador is this: his words express the heavenly points of view. He perceives things differently than the people of the world, and he certainly lives differently too. While He walked the earth, Jesus Christ was the Ambassador of God and so, every word He spoke represented the policies of the government of God. The following are some of the heavenly statements which Jesus habitually made: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work"; "Let the dead bury their dead"; "As it is in heaven"; "He that believeth not [on the Son of God] is condemned already"; "He that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live"; "He that believeth in me, out of him shall flow rivers of living water"; and so on.

CHAPTER 5

SOLDIER FROM THE CROSS

When any man comes to the cross for redemption, he is not to just stand at the foot of the cross staring up at Christ. Rather, he must pick up the uniform which Christ the supreme comrade Himself once roamed the earth wearing. And when that man descends from Calvary's mountain, he is no longer just any man but a soldier who has signed off the remainder of his life to be spent in battles and victories and scars and joy until he lays down his sword in death. If the foregoing is true for everyone who has been born of God, how much more for a Christian preacher? Apostle Paul, just in case we were unsure of our military calling, helped us clear our doubts in advance by acknowledging himself and other servants of Christ as soldiers (Philippians 2:25; Philemon 1:2).

A soldier is not one apart from the excruciating and hardening training he has been subjected to as well as the self-disciplined life he continues to lead. To their own confusion alas, many a "man of God" are found living like an Arab prince in his luxurious palace rather than as a soldier in a battle trench. A preacher whose life does not have the perks of the military-life-in-Christ may very well consider himself as being in the devil's cage already. In this generation so sold to creature comfort and impatience, and at such a time as now when part-time Christianity holds sway in the church arena, it is true that the soldiers of Christ are an endangered species. Look and see, says the Spirit, that the watchmen posts are now being remodelled to look and feel very much like the VIP cabinets in strip clubs and bars. The once hot and heavily guarded military cantonments of God's earthly armies are fast becoming well air-conditioned legislative chambers full of greedy comfort-seekers and foolish psychologists. But let it be known that the military life imposed on us by the cross of Christ is indeed one of the glories of the

Christian calling. However, in emphasising the military life in Christ, we are not talking of asceticism which is the self-imposed bodily pain and social difficulty a man may adopt in order to find or please God. Rather, we are talking here of the hardness and suffering a man experiences as a result of his Christian choices, and which he also chooses to endure for the sake of the Lord who found and saved him from the power of the darkness of this world.

THE MILITARISM OF CHRISTIANITY

The military of any empire that will expand is crucial. The kingdom of the Lord will expand on earth but that expansion must be by spiritual force. The unseen principalities and powers of darkness only speak the language of violence and if we are going to deliver the captive souls from them or retrieve territories from them, it will be by the force of the Holy Spirit – because the wicked violent will not let go of anything except by force. And really, there is nothing like powerless Christianity. A powerless Christian is a good for nothing. I mean, not every Christian will be able to part the Red Sea or invoke fire from heaven or raise the dead, but when you call yourself a Christian, you must have power over self and sin - and make no mistake, sin is a form of violence – a violence that has left the earth deformed and void (Isaiah 24:5).

STANDARD OF CHRISTIAN MILITARY

The military that honours the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Supreme Commander of all the holy forces of the universe, holds up to the following standards:

- Trimmed and united – strength is not always in number. And as far as the Christian calling is concerned, very few are chosen. Christian soldiers are ever trimmed down to the few who are ready to lay down their lives for the glorious gospel of Christ. They are men and women who,

through habitual spiritual exercise and sacrifice, are fast losing the fats of levity and greed. Truly, the trimming of spiritual fats makes the Christian soldier sound enough to respond to spiritual signals and emergencies with Holy Ghost agility. But soldiers of Christ must also live their well trimmed lives in unity. Soldiers on the battle field do not discriminate against each other as long as they are on the same side. So also preachers of the gospel, wherever and whenever they find one other, must see themselves as fellow comrades and should never feel the need to compete against one another.

- Well-Fed and Well-Disciplined – the duties of a soldier require physical as well as mental fitness - and good food is necessary for this. The Christian soldier needs good food, not just the spiritual food but also the physical. While the task of staying on the spiritual balanced diet of the undiluted word of God is the responsibility of the individual preacher, the responsibility of protecting the preacher from physical starvation lies on the Christian community to which he belongs and on the generality of the people his ministry blesses home and abroad (Deuteronomy 12:19). As brethren in Christ, we are much obligated to care especially for the needs of the preachers of the gospel who have forsaken all secular jobs in order to be totally available for the work of the gospel always. And scriptures say that this kindness to be enjoyed by fulltime ministers is not a privilege but their entitlement, howbeit it is an entitlement which they cannot forcibly extract from the people (2Timothy 2:24).
- Courageous and Obedient - courage, of course, does not always mean the absence of fear but rather, it is the ability of a man to face up to his fears. The Apostle Paul, for instance, hinted that he at times served amidst fears

(Acts 27:24; 1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 9:5). The apostle's fear however could not separate him from the love of Christ. The ministry of the gospel is really not for cowards – courage, then, is a must have! But courage without obedience will only lead the Christian soldier into much sorrow that could have easily been avoided otherwise. As a matter fact, the purpose of a soldier's courage is so that he can obey command, not invent them. Every soldier of Christ must meticulously seek out the will of God and courageously obey it.

- Selfless and Educated – a true soldier is selfless otherwise, he could not choose to face death for his people. In any case, selflessness is a virtue every true believer in Christ must possess. Also, education is important for a soldier to function uninhibitedly and lawfully. Any believer that will stand and fight as a true soldier of the Lord has to be well-informed of the principles as well as privileges of the kingdom of God. That way, a preacher knows how not to entangle himself with the affairs of this world in order for him to please the Lord who has called him to be a soldier. But by education we are not talking here of the acquisition of human certifications. Rather, we refer here to the knowledge of God which is gotten from being alone with God a lot, and from the fellowship of Christ's suffering. The profitable soldier of Christ is guided by a clear understanding of the policies as well as the grief of the Lord.

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