

PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING

of

CHRIST

*"...when ye shall see
all these things, know
that it is near, even at
the doors."*

(Matthew 24:33)

*"Take ye heed, watch and pray:
for ye know not when the time
is."*

(Mark 13:33)

Moses Ayomikun Oladipupo



INTRODUCTORY HYMN

Nothing Know We Of The Season
By Thomas Kelly (1769-1855) in 1809

Nothing know we of the season
When the world shall pass away;
But we know, the saints have reason
To expect a glorious day;
When the Savior shall return,
And His people cease to mourn.

While a careless world is sleeping,
Then it is the day will come;
Mirth will then be turned to weeping,
Sinners then must meet their doom;
But the people of the Lord
Shall obtain their bright reward.

O what sacred joys await them!
They shall see the Savior then;
Those who now oppose and hate them
Never can oppose again;
Brethren, let us think of this:
All is ours, if we are His.

Waiting for the Lord's returning,
Be it ours His word to keep;
Let our lamps be always burning;
Let us watch while others sleep;
We're no longer of the night;
We are children of the light.

Being of the favored number
Whom the Savior calls His own,
'Tis not meet that we should slumber,
Nothing should be left undone:
This should be His people's aim,
Still to glorify His name!

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"...when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

(Matthew 24:33)

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."

(Mark 13:33)

PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

By

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SECTION 1

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

With a heart full of gratitude to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the One, True, and Living God, I present my book **"PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST."** It is a collection of a series of teachings I preached in Bible Studies for teens in my local church on the subject. Sadly, in the process of handling the topic I was suspended (on the 2nd of July 2017) for refusing to be taught by a female in the Sunday School. I was also prohibited from continuing to teach in the Bible studies for the same reason. After a while passed and I was not restored, not wanting the message I had prepared to just die away being only preached a little more than half way, I decided to compile it into a book and share it with the brotherhood. I was the more happy to write the book seeing that the time of Christ's return is far sooner than ever before.

As Christians, we believe in many things. We believe in the One True And Living God, we believe that Jesus is his Son, we believe in the Holy Spirit, we believe that the Bible is God's word, etc. We also believe in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing that we believe in the coming of the blessed One, we must ensure that we're ready for his coming. This was the essence of the teachings of the Bible Study I thought and consequently the essence of this book.

Getting ourselves prepared and remaining prepared is of the utmost importance to each and everyone of us as Christians. The

Lord Jesus Christ says, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). This tells us that everything in the world put together is not worth a man's soul. All the properties in Dubai, Paris, and the world over put together is not worth your soul. Having all the armed forces in the world (including all terrorists and militants) at your command is not worth your soul. Nothing is worth your soul and for this reason, there's nothing so great that you should count so dear and important that you can't forsake when your soul is at stake.

However, due to the blindness of heart prevalent in this fallen world, people are willing to give away their souls for a piece of bread. We are not very conscious of the value of our souls. When you take a thief for example, he steals an android phone thinking it is worth so much, and he does that at the expense of his soul. If we're conscious of the value of our souls we'd know that there's nothing of real benefit that is of this world.

So what shall it profit us if we gain the whole world and fail to be prepared when he returns for his own? No matter what we are pursuing in life, your soul is far more important than it. Preparing for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is far more important than anything else we may be engaged in in life. For this reason, I hope that we take the things written in this book very seriously.

When you look at the world stage what do you see? I see God giving a modest reminder to the world about his coming. Who's the number one person of the number one nation of the world today? Donald Trump. I'm not campaigning for him but wish to point out something to us. I strongly believe that God has

appointed this man for a time such as this to bring back to our memory, in case we have forgotten what shall happen at the last "trump" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Go anywhere in the world and watch any news you can via any medium, the Internet, the television, magazines, you see "Trump" everywhere. You can't escape this modest warning. As a matter of fact, the way God has ordained things is such that the popular media is so much against him so that in looking for faults, there's so much you'd hear them say and analyse everyday about his every gesture. The trump message is everywhere you look. You can't escape it. I believe God ordained it so for your sake and my sake.

Donald Trump is a powerful end time message of God beyond what the good man realises himself. He's got a bad past, but he's changed now. At least he appears so. That's a powerful message from a loving Saviour. Have you made mistakes in the past? Have you lived badly? Have you done things that you think you can never be forgiven? This is God calling you back home saying, "o don't be silly. Come back home my child. You can't be too bad for me. Come back home, get ready, I'm coming soon." These and much more are the powerful messages being broadcasted from the White House, on your newspapers, television, etc. You can't escape noticing such a message. You can't be too bad for him to save.

God being so wonderfully good "a blogger and social media expert" has tagged his message on the number one man on the planet for you to see, to be warned, to be called, and to be saved. Like a trumpet in the ancient world, I believe, that God intended and intends to use the Trump message to rally his people (both saved and not yet saved) to himself and prepare them for his second coming. Like the foxes with which Samson set the field of

the Philistines on fire, they didn't have any controversy to settle with the Philistines, they didn't have any hurt they were seeking revenge for, they don't even know the Philistines, they were only trying to get free from each other, or they were only fleeing from the fire on their tails, but they didn't know that they were setting the field of the Philistines on fire. Yet he who tied them together knew very well what he was doing. Same way that Donald Trump is just going about his duties in carrying out the mandate of his nation, but while he does it, he's preaching a loud message for the Lord, "behold I come quickly..." He is probably not aware and he's not trying to do it because he's not a preacher, but he who ordained it so that he should be the president of the United States of America at this present time knows very well what he's doing. So don't miss the message. For God to be doing all these now just tells us that the time is near. Very very near.

Another reason why I'm so convinced that the time is near is his revelation to me. There was a time in the past (about ten years ago, this year being 2018) that God revealed to me in a dream the things that I shall experience soon. He showed me different things of which all of them have now taken place. The last of the understandable things he showed to me was my suspension which I talked about above. It was while I was writing this book I remember the dream and I recalled my being suspended from my church in the dream and it surprised me that everything I saw in the dream have been fulfilled one after the other. After seeing my suspension in the dream, a lot of things happened really fast that I could not comprehend them, then immediately after those things, just as I was about to wake up, I heard a clear voice say to me, "your salvation has come." Then I woke up. I wondered what the dream could mean but I didn't understand it

until after the events.

If the salvation being referred to is the second coming of the Lord, as I hope and trust that it is, then the time is really really soon. Jesus said, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke 21:28). His word to me was not "your salvation draweth nigh," but "your salvation has come." If the last of the things I saw in that dream happened on the 2nd of July 2017, then, I believe and hope, in the very near future the Lord shall return. For this reason I was all the more glad to bring this book to a speedy completion in the hope that it may help warn people to be prepared to meet a favourable day when the Lord shall come.

I pray that God blesses and make you prepared as you read it. Thank you and God bless you.

Ayomikun.

PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning."

(Mark 13:35)

First of all, in preparing for the coming of our Lord, you don't have to know when he is going to come again, you just have to be ready when he does come. If our knowledge of the time of his coming were important, he could have told us the time. Many people busy themselves trying to find out the exact time of his coming. They keep gazing into the unseeable future looking for signs to predict the day of his coming. I've heard a lot of things down the years in this respect. About the year 2000, when the millennium was approaching, many prophesied that Jesus was going to come in the year 2000. Some people gathered themselves in a church and burnt the church down thinking that is the way to Heaven. That is to say if you die while praying in church, you'd go to Heaven. That was sad.

There's an expression I read about in novel of someone who tried to cheat the Devil and go scot-free. And I think some who are keen about knowing the exact time of Jesus' return have motives

that can be described this way too. You know the Devil is always cooking with a big pot and a trident in hand, so they want to go to the Devil, deep their fork into his pot, take the biggest piece of meat, run away with it and go scot-free. But things don't work that way. You can't take the Devil's property and not pay the price for it. What I mean by this is, the Devil always have sumptuous offers for everyone. Sin is so full of pleasure and he's always cooking new meals of sin. He never requires money or any other thing as a price, all he always wants is just your soul. So people want to cheat the Devil by enjoying his sins, then a week or so to the time of Jesus' coming, they repent. This way they've enjoyed the Devil's delight and when the payday comes, having known the exact time of Jesus' coming, they abscond to heaven. But you can't cheat the Devil that way and go scot free.

Such people read the apocalyptic writings of the Bible over and over again and compare this verse with that verse. They also study closely the events in the present day world and throughout history trying to figure out when Christ will come. They come up with a lot of theories. Some of these people become so speculative about everything. When Sadam Hussein was alive, they said he was the Antichrist. Then he died and they start looking around again for who next to point finger at. Obama came and they said "he's the Antichrist. Yes. That's him." I think they were close in that one. Very close. The very moment Donald Trump won the US presidential election they started calling the good man the Antichrist too. Everybody is Antichrist. I was surprised to find out that some people claimed that John F. Kennedy was the Antichrist while he was president. As good as he was. We cannot afford to join them in this ridiculous speculative game. Jesus Christ told us that nobody knows the time when he's coming, meaning it is futile for you to try to know, and knowing the

future does not have anything to do with you being prepared when he does come.

It is also written in Luke 17:20, "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." This was the response Jesus gave to the Pharisees who wished, like many "scholars" of today, to know when exactly he shall come. But he was clear. Observation of the times is futile in being prepared for his second coming. So you have to be prepared every second and keep watching for his coming because you can't know the hour of his coming.

In this light also, when he was about to ascend back to heaven, the apostles still wished to know the time of the restoration and his response also applies to us and the knowing of the time of his return. He responded saying, "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:7). That is quite clear, it is not for us to know the time of his return. In other words, knowing the time of his return is not our business.

Matthew 24:37 - 42 says, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." By this statement we know that till the very

moment he returns, there shall be no sign of the time.

Someone may ask, if Jesus didn't want us to know the time of his coming, to what essence were all the prophecies he prophesied about the end time and to what purpose were the revelations he revealed to his apostles? Well he answered that quite clearly and succinctly when he said, "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." (John 16:4). So we can see that the prophecies in the Bible are for remembrance and not for foretelling.

Why is remembrance important? While knowing the time of his coming is very unimportant to our being prepared, the remembrance of his words when they come to fulfillment is very important. This is because times shall come when we may begin to doubt the Bible, but when we see his prophecies coming to pass, it reassures us of his truth and strengthens our faith. If he foretold these things and they're coming to pass in every way according to his words, we can also be sure that the same way every other things he said that hasn't been fulfilled shall all be fulfilled one after the other without fail. Everything shall be fulfilled including the judgment day and those things prophesied about our time in heaven. Nothing shall fail. So his prophecies are for remembrance, and remembrance is for the strengthening of our faith.

From the time of his resurrection, there has always been signs of his imminent return, but there shall not be signs by which we may know the time of his return. Signs that he will return, yes, but signs of when he'll return, no. All these should be sufficient enough to dissuade us from trying to know the times and seasons. Let us just focus on being ready. That's what we should

strive towards.

Mark 13:33-37 says, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." So you see that we have to be ready always. All that Christ tells us that we need to do to be prepared is, take heed, watch, and pray. You need nothing more, and of course nothing less. Those are the three major preoccupation that every Christian ought to be occupied with if they are to be ready for the coming of the Lord. So you don't have to busy yourself studying about end time events, about the AntiChrist, etc.

It is not a scary thing not to know the exact time of his return. It only means we must take heed, watch, and pray. Some may say, "what if he returns at exactly that moment when I sin? What if he returns at exactly that moment when that lie slips out of my mouth?" You needn't bother a bit about that. I wish to assure you that nobody who takes heed, watch, and pray, shall be found wanting on that day. I also wish to assure you that anybody who shall be found wanting on that day shall be found wanting simply because he failed to obey this simple command. If Jesus presents this as a solution to being prepared we ought not to doubt or fear that day provided we take heed to his command. His words are faithful and true.

It is sad that Christians of today have so many things by which

they distract themselves from obeying these three little commands. Whatsapp, Facebook, English Premiership, and even many frivolous entertainments. There're so many distractions and these things can make us not to be prepared when the Lord shall come. In our Lord's statement, we did not hear him say, "enjoy yourselves..." as many Christians are just looking for fun everywhere. You see Christians leave their churches to join other local churches, not because of perceived errors in their local church, but they do so all in the search for fun. These churches that draw Christians away often offer fun, interesting drama with very professional theatrical display, music concerts, picnics, parties, and what have you. Even when some read their Bible, they go to it searching for fun, and when they don't find fun they dump it. These are signs of blindness to the injunction of Christ that says, "take heed, watch, and pray."

He didn't also say that you should graduate from the University with a first class upper as many young Christians today are pushing hard for. If you ask someone, "did you read your Bible today?" He'd respond, "no." You in turn ask, "why?" and he tells you he was doing his assignment, there were so many assignments, and all that. Sadder is how they say it thinking that such reason, or rather excuse, is legitimate and reasonable. I'm not saying these things are not good, education is good, but you must be able to put first things first. When you tell someone that because of your assignment you couldn't read your Bible and pray, I'm really sorry for you. That your good grades, that your excellence in academics, would never take you anywhere towards heaven. You may by it be prosperous in this world, but it will not take you to heaven. Jesus Christ knew about these things, for he knows the end from the beginning, but he didn't make reference to these things to show you how very unimportant they are. The

world may applaud these things, nations may have it as a criteria for this or that, everything may be in support of you having these things and give you thumbs up for achieving it, but to Jesus Christ, it wasn't important.

He didn't also say that everybody must be happy with you so much that you spend your time trying to please everybody. You don't need to be a men pleaser who dares not offend anybody. Jesus Christ himself was not a pleaser of everybody. Jesus Christ was not even too bothered about being a family pleaser. Mark 3:32-35 says, "And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." That isn't very nice. Telling people that some other people have taken their place is not nice as many people try to paint Jesus Christ as a Mr. Super Nice Guy. If he was a people pleaser, he'd have jumped to his feet and run to his family with his smile widening from east to west. But he cared little for all that people pleasing life. He found himself continuously in opposition to religious leaders of his time, the Pharisees, the Saducess, the Sanhendrins, and every devoted Jew. He found himself in variance with these people often time because all he wanted was to do his Father's will and wasn't so bothered about anybody else's will. Not even his own very will.

The holy apostles too were not people pleasers, as Paul wrote, in Galatians 1:10, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." As many as are servants of God don't seek to

please men but God only.

So you don't have to preoccupy yourself with all these that you see that are prevalent among people today, or any other thing that may come to mind. The only three things that we must occupy ourselves in doing to ensure that we are prepared when he comes is, to take heed, to watch, and to pray. These are the things I shall be talking about in this book. I pray that as you read along God shall bless you and make you ready on that blessed day when the Lord our God shall return.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord and Father, we see that your Son is coming soon and there are so many things that can make us so unprepared to meet that blessed day. Please help us to avoid distractions here and there and to focus on obeying the command of your dear Son to take heed, watch, and pray. As I progress through this book, please reveal your truth to me in Jesus' name. Amen.*

SECTION 2

TAKING HEED

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TAKE HEED

"Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God."

(Joshua 23:11)

Before we go ahead to talk about the command to take heed, we need to know first what it means to take heed. This will help us to understand the command to the fuller extent.

To take heed is primarily to listen but not just to listen, it also means to pay attention. You know these are two different things. To listen is one thing, to pay attention is another. It is not also just to pay attention, but to pay attention with the intent of getting an instruction, or getting information of what should guide your conduct. And when this instruction is understood, to take heed also goes on to mean to carefully obey that which you've been told. So it is not just the casual listening, it cuts across from listening all the way down to carefully obeying. Not casual or reluctant obedience but careful obedience. So that if you listen, pay attention, seek to understand and get instruction, etc. without carefully obeying, you didn't take heed.

Other words that are synonymous to taking heed are to notice, to observe, to regard, to be cautious, to bear in mind, etc. Whatever sense the word heed is understood, the absence of it always leads

to acting disregardingly about that which a person failed to take heed to. In the days of David, Joab sought to kill Amasa because David had vowed to make him his General in place of Joab. On the day that Joab killed him, we read, "But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died..." (2 Samuel 20:10). I suppose the sense in which the word heed is used here is synonymous with notice. The sword in the hand of Joab was supposed to be a cause for alarm but he didn't notice it and therefore didn't regard it only to be slayed by it.

So to take heed is broad, way broader than to listen. All its synonyms are just different aspects of the broad word. Whatsoever way you choose to understand it, the bottom line is that taking heed terminates in careful obedience to that which one has heard.

***Prayer:** Dear Father and Lord, please help us to take heed to everything you want us to take heed to and never disregard any. Help us that in every thing you say to us we shall find ourselves stopping at nothing short of careful obedience. This we ask in Jesus' dear name.
 Amen.*

TAKING HEED TO THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."

(2 Peter 1:19)

Now, what are we to take heed to. We shall look at few things to take heed to and the first and by far the most important is taking heed to written word of God. This refers to the Bible. We must take wholistic heed to the Bible if we must be prepared for the coming of the Lord. There are many things that people may think plays such a vital role in our being prepared, such as revelations, super natural encounters, etc. In a song of a popular gospel artiste, he sang saying, "I'll make it to the end if I could just see your face." People may agree to that and think that seeing God's face helps a lot but there's no guarantee in that. Apart from the fact that God would probably not show you his face, we probably could see his face and still not make it to the end. Rather I can assure you that nothing is more important to our being prepared than taking heed to this simple book of the Bible. You can't take heed to Bible and not make it to the end. It far supercede all things else. There's no gift of all the gifts we have in life given us by God greater than the Bible.

You just need to go through the Bible and see what it did to lives of men. We read "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction." Such is the power of the Bible. The difference between Jacob and Esau was just the word of God. God gave Jacob the Law, but we can't find anywhere that he gave Esau the Law also. We can also hear God say, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." (Romans 9:13). This passage refers to Malachi 1. If you read that chapter, you shall find all the things that God said he would do unto Esau on account of his hatred for him. And the way he achieves this was by withholding his Law from him. But Jacob he gave the Law because he loved him and by that Law to guide him in the way by which he shall not suffer the affliction of Esau. So if God does not love you, he will withhold his word from you, allowing you to follow your instincts to incur losses and harm.

2 Peter 1:17-19 says, "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." This words, written by Peter, referred to his experience with Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration. You can read the encounter in Matthew 17:1-10. In that experience, they saw Elijah and Moses conversing with Jesus and they heard the very voice of God from heaven. To hear the voice of the God that made all things is an incredible privilege capable of clearing all doubts about God's existence and any other doubt we may have about God. It is this

magnificent experience that Peter was making reference to in this his epistle.

This is a super privilege that everybody would wish they could have. They would think that this would be final in verifying everything that pertains to the claims about God. If anyone doubts the truth, he probably wouldn't doubt if God were to speak to him on the matter with his own voice as this probably helped the disciples to believe more in Jesus. This is very true, but listen to what Peter says after this, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed..." Imagine the power of the effect the voice of God would have had on these apostles in clearing any doubt they may have had as to if Jesus was truly the Messiah or not, but Peter describes the written Word of prophecy as "more sure." That is to say the written word are even surer than the magnificent revelation they had of the holy prophets of old, the transfiguration of Christ, and the voice of God. By this we know that this little book in our hands is not little at all. It supercedes in greatness every other thing we have in this earth. It supercedes all revelations and spiritual experience we may have.

Even if we listen for the voice of God or an angel or something, we can get deceived for there are many voices that can speak to you. There are sometimes that your stomach will speak to you and you think God has spoken. There was a man that got up one day and started saying God had called him to become a preacher, but when the people about him observed him well and saw it was very unlikely that God was calling him, so they got him quite a nice job. Later they asked him, "is God still calling you?" He said, "No."

We humans are weak, especially when it comes to spiritual things, and for this reason there are many voices we can confuse for the voice of God, but we can't confuse anything for the written word unless we do not read and understand the Bible. Moving on to verse 20 and 21 of 2 Peter 1, we read, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." So we see that interpretation of the Bible belongs to the Holy Ghost but we'll come to that later.

In Luke 16:19-31 we read of a rich man languishing in hell beseeching Abraham to send Moses from the dead thinking that if they should see Moses rise up from the dead to warn them, but Abraham's response was simply this, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets [referring to the written word], neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:30-31)

Many people go about looking for miracles, and supernatural manifestations to show forth the power of God, but brethren you don't need all that. Not that God can't do miracles to amuse you everyday, but it is not important to your being prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the most important thing for you. You just need to pay attention to the Bible. Not even if someone rose from the dead to warn you can you have the conviction to be saved, but taking heed to the written word shall suffice.

Psalms 138:2 says, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." So you see here also that God magnifies his word above all his name. The

Bible is a great book that can save your soul. This Bible in your hand is magnified of God above all his name. And what are the names of God? The Almighty, the Holy One, the Sanctifier, you can name them. We therefore know that this Bible is magnified of God more than all those names.

So let us take heed to it. Back to 2 Peter 1:19 where it says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed..." So we would do well to take heed of which we have looked carefully at what it means to take heed in the previous chapter. We would do well to obey the Bible. Obedience is key to being prepared for his coming. Jesus Christ says in Matthew 4:4, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." So we have to take heed to everything God has to say in his word. This is how man shall live lest he dies.

You see, many people wish to follow God on their own terms. You'd certainly fail if you wish to walk with God on the terms of your own desires. We can't bend God into our ways, but if we must follow him so as to be prepared, we must change our ways to align to his written word. We have to take heed to every word of God the way it is written and ought to be understood by divine leading. Many so called Christians dislike the Bible and like to twist everything written therein out of its meaning.

I wrote a post on Facebook on why women should not speak in the churches quoting the Bible and a "Christian" woman reacted with a sad emoticon. I asked her, "what's the sad face for? Don't like your Bible?" She said, "When women shouldn't speak." I didn't get exactly what she meant, and she didn't give me a response when I sought clarification. People who don't like the

Bible and still claim to be Christians are just deceiving themselves. Such people are those who would keep interpreting the Bible to be saying something other than what it is saying in truth. To this foolish interpretation they indeed take heed but not to the word of God in truth. Such people should never think that they are going with Christ when he comes.

I was chatting with someone on Whatsapp one day and he asked me if someone wants to come to a certain knowledge of certain things he mentioned, what part of the Bible should one read. I told him that he shouldn't go choosing portions of the Bible to read. You have to read the whole Bible because if you read only parts of the Bible you'll not understand it as you ought. The Bible is like (as one author puts it) a full package. If you get rid of one verse, you have to, over time, get rid of everything. So you have to take heed to the whole.

2 Peter 1:19 went on to say, "...take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." So this is what you ought to do continuously, from day to day. You are to ensure you're continuously taking heed to the written word of God. You have to keep improving yourself day by day. This you should do "UNTIL the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts," which we could take to mean until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the first and most important thing to do in preparing for the second coming of our Lord is to take heed to the written word. You shouldn't just listen to it, you should also apply it to your life in careful obedience. I pray that God help us all in this and every regard as we prepare for the coming of his dear Son. Amen.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord and Father, as we wait for the coming of your Son Jesus, grant us the grace to take absolute heed to your written word. May we not neglect it to the doom of our precious souls. This I ask in Jesus' dear name. Amen.*

TAKING HEED TO THE SPEAKING VOICE OF GOD

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

(John 16:13)

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice..."

(Revelation 3:20)

Now to the speaking voice of God. God has a speaking voice and he speaks to every born again Christian. This is a privilege we all have, but it largely depends on you though if you're willing to perceive when he's speaking. It may be an audible voice like Peter, James, and John heard on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) and other places we can see in scriptures where God spoke audibly, but usually he speaks to us through that inward witnessing of the Holy Spirit. This inward witnessing, I believe, is what every Christian experiences. The very first thing upon your conversion is that his Spirit witnesses to your own spirit that you're born again (Romans 8:15-16). So if the first thing (or one of the first things) that a foetus experiences after conception is that his heart begins to beat and that is the evidence of life, how shall it be thought a strange a thing if the

heart beats all the way to his old age and death? If his heart stops beating, is it not an evidence that he's dead? Same way, if on being born again, his spirit witnesses to our spirit, how shall it be thought strange that all through our life's journey from that time forth he witnesses to our spirit from day to day. If he stops witnessing like at the start, is that not an evidence that a person in such a state is spiritually dead? So, I believe that the speaking voice of God, either by an audible voice of God or an inward witnessing to our spirit, is a privilege that every single born again Christian has. If you don't hear him, I doubt you're born again.

The Gospel according to John started with these words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). John here is introducing Jesus Christ and he introduced Jesus Christ as "the Word." This reveals to us, according to A.W. Tozer, that God is ever willing to express himself to us through the medium of speaking. He's ever willing to tell us how to go about our lives, what to do in every given circumstance, etc. So we must be willing to hear him when he does speak.

Psalms 32:8-9 says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." God has a voice with which he speaks to us. It's a very gentle voice and it is not forceful. God will not shout at you, coerce you, nor will he force you, but he'll speak to you with a gentle voice. It is by listening to that voice that he can guide you.

He said "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go..." This verse does not place any limitation on what he's willing to instruct us about. It is in no way restricted to instructing us about what to preach alone, what career we should choose, or whatever we may think is so important that should attract the attention of the Almighty. He's willing to instruct us on every aspect of our lives that we so inquire of him. Both those we think are important and those we think he shouldn't bother about.

Now he says, "I will guide thee with mine eye..." What does that tell us? It tells us that God wants us to be sensitive and attentive to him. Let's say some visitors come to your house and your parent wants you to bring a cup of water, they don't necessarily have to scream at the top of their voice, "John, bring a cup of water for our guests!" Probably if you understand your parents very well, they'll just need to give you a certain look and you'd know exactly what they want you to do. Or another example, probably more common than the instance of bringing water is the instance of when you have done badly in the presence of a visitor. There's this look they'll give you, without moving their lips to say a word, you'd know that you're in soup.

In a case where visitors come to your house and you're busy playing. Maybe they came with their children too and you guys are just playing away so much that you're not attentive to your parents, and they're trying to call your attention but you can't notice them because you're too busy playing. There is a time they'll stop and have to go get the water themselves. This is the way with God. He'll not force you to hear him, he will only seek to pass his message across to you with the eye expecting that you'll give him your attention. When you're too busy playing with

the things of this life, you'll not know the countless messages he's been trying to deliver to you.

The reason why many Christian don't hear God is because they're not attentive to him. He has spoken to them once or twice, giving them signs, but they didn't understand and didn't take heed, so he stops speaking to them seeing they're dull of hearing. So this should help us to understand what God means by saying "I will guide thee with mine eye..." Understanding the messages of such a communication requires our prior attention on our part. Unlike other ways of communicating in which you could first call the attention of the hearer before delivering your message, such messages God communicates with the eye cannot be delivered while we are distracted. God wants us to be attentive and sensitive to him at all times so as to be able to hear from him.

He went on to say, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding..." God wants us to walk with him having a good understanding of his voice. He wants us to be able to understand his mode of communication. What if your parents wants you to do something and they start winking at you but you can't just understand what message they're trying to pass across to you? What if you go ahead and ask them aloud in the hearing of this guest, "dad [or mom], what's with your eyes?" Of course that would be so embarrassing. For this reason he admonishes us here that we should walk with him with an understanding mind. A mind that understands every gesture of his spirit.

Lastly, in that verse, we must note that he compares people without understanding as a mule or horse that must be forced to be guided. He admonishes us saying, we should not be like such.

God shall never force us to do anything in life. He doesn't maintain that kind of a relationship of which he forces people. He walks and communicates with the willing, sensitive, attentive, and understanding people.

If he wasn't willing to speak to us, he should have not given us such an admonition. But because he wants to talk to us he gives us his advice on how to receive from him. So how can it be assumed by Christians that hearing from God is a rare thing? If Jesus was introduced as the Word, and we see all this admonition from God to be attentive to him, is it not glaring that God wants to talk to us? So let us not doubt but believe that God does speak and for this reason pay close attention to what he has to say.

If God must speak to us, we must have a heart ready to obey him. If God speaks to us and we ignore him, by so doing we despise him. God does not give his word where it shall return to him void. He gives his word on the basis that it'll be obeyed. He says, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10 - 11). God does not send his word where he knows it shall be disobeyed except for the purpose of judgment. So when we hear his voice (not only his speaking voice), rebuking us, may be through the written word, the sermon of a preacher, the advice of a Christian friend, a Christian book, etc. and we despise it, we shouldn't expect the same one who's voice we've despised to approach us more

intimately to speak to us himself trying to guide us. A voice to tell us, "no, don't go there," "stay here," etc. This is why many Christians run into trouble because, through disobedience, there's no voice that's guiding them. So obedience to the instructions of God we've heard is very essential for us to hear a more intimate speaking voice.

Now why is the speaking voice important? The written word is the most important thing we must give heed to. It is the foundation of all that makes a good Christian life. But though you read it all you want, you cannot understand it except the Holy Ghost teaches you and he teaches you through his speaking voice. Jesus says, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (John 16:13). Note the words "whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak..." The Holy Ghost communicates to us by means of a speaking voice. This is the major reason why the speaking voice is so important.

The letters of the word must be given life by the Spirit, else it won't profit us. Without the Holy Ghost teaching us, the Bible would at best be a wonderful piece of literature and historical account. We shall be amused, we shall get information from it, but we shall not understand it. Unless the Holy Spirit teaches us we can know nothing of God's will though we read it over and over again.

This is why many "Christians" can't understand the Bible. They go to church from Sunday to Sunday, listen to sermons supported with texts from the Bible, and they still can't understand it. Some read it on their own and study it only to arrive at

conclusions very far from the will of God. Why is this so? It is usually because they haven't obeyed and are not willing to obey the little they've heard from God, so how shall the Holy Ghost teach them? That is why we have many people who read the Bible yet understand little or nothing about God. When you tell them clearly quoting from scriptures, rather than simply understanding it and live by what they heard, they only get confused. Some would even respond saying, "I don't understand why God would say that..." An obstinate and stiff necked person shall never hear from the Holy Ghost, and he who does not hear the Holy Ghost speak to him shall never understand the will of God.

I've heard arguments such as, when you were newly born again you heard the voice of God regularly, but when you begin to grow you start hearing less often. The propounders of this argument argue that this is as a result of maturity. That is to say, at the early stage of your conversion God spoke to you often because you needed it to grow. Now that you're grown you don't need to hear him so often any longer. But I can assure you that this is far from the truth. When God begins to speak less to you, it is most likely because you've left him or has spurned his word previously spoken to you.

It is true that when I got converted newly I heard from God often especially through dreams, and it is true that as time went on, there were times indeed when he began to speak less to me, but those times were times when my ways were not right with him. Some times it was for a wrong I did and failed to recognise it and confess and repent of it, at other times it was because there were things I failed to give up though they were not bad. In both circumstances when I realised my wrong, confessed, and

repented of it, I start hearing him again and feeling him close to me. Also when I gave up things for his name's sake, he begins to draw close to me like never before. Unlike through dreams as at the beginning, he responds to me even more quickly when my ways were right with him. Even when I ask him questions he'd give me a response in my spirit instantly.

Now, there are even times that God draws away from you when you've been very righteous. You have no wrongs, you've been pure in all your doings, you've been everything that you ought to be, the only problem with you in such a case is that you've become too righteous. You've become way too righteous that even God draws back from you. I got to know this at a time when I felt God was far from me. I couldn't tell why. Worried about this and knowing that the sermons of A.W. Tozer always had a way of sending revival to the hearts of his listeners, I played one of his sermons I had downloaded. One striking statement he made that restored me back to God was (paraphrased), "it's been long you felt contrite." I realised this was true. I only felt contrition when I find myself sinning, and now that I didn't have any sin to be contrite for (by my own standards) I went from day to day not feeling any contrition. But there're always things to be contrite for, not just outright sin. Careful examination of ones thoughts, motives, words, and actions would reveal this. So while I was so righteous, God left me. But the moment, upon listening to A.W. Tozer's sermon, I became contrite for the little bads here and there and the goods that ought to have been better, I found his presence rushing into my life again.

So God speaks to his children all through there lives. Don't ever think that a time can come in your life when God would be willing to leave you to yourself saying, "he's a big boy now, he

can take care of himself." That won't happen. As I advanced in the faith, what really changed with growth was not the frequency of his speaking voice but the content of the message of the speaking voice. When I was newly converted, the messages tended to be more of assurance of answered prayers. When I prayed, I get quick response assuring me that he has heard me. But when I had my confidence well built in the fact that he always hears me, the messages tends to be more of teaching, explanations, revelations about the future, etc. For a God who seeks to have an intimate relationship with us (Revelations 3:20), it would be too bad to conclude that he'd be content to leave us on account of our growing up. If it begins to seem that he's distant and you stop hearing him, it is not because you're growing. Rather it is because you're failing. In such cases, don't beat your chest that you're growing, rather, examine yourself and repent. In so doing you shall doubtless feel his presence again. We shall talk more on this issue in the next chapter.

The speaking voice of God is essential to our being prepared for his second coming because by it shall you be guided in a safe path for your feet. Only by it can you be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. Without the speaking voice you shall not be able to have any true faith in God, and if you cease to listen to the speaking voice of God after you once listened to him, thinking you're growing, you shall shipwreck that faith. There's no way man shall meet a favourable day when the Lord shall come ignoring his speaking voice.

Prayer: Dear Father, I see that without your speaking voice guiding and leading me I shall certainly wreck my faith and meet an unfavourable day when your dear Son shall come again. Help me to

*always take heed to your speaking voice and meet a favourable day
when you return. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

TAKING HEED TO THE VOICE OF THE CONSCIENCE

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

(1 Timothy 1:5)

Now we shall look at the voice of the conscience. This is something that has been downplayed in recent years. The conscience does have a voice and we must be able to hear and take heed to the voice of the conscience or else we would miss the mark.

1 Peter 3:21 says "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." So we see here that even baptism which is one of the most important sacrament of the Christian faith is an answer of a good conscience toward God.

Before I go on, let me use this opportunity to point out briefly that the moment one believes, he or she should do all it takes to get baptised as soon as possible. We see the importance the apostles place on it when we read about the jailer of Paul and Silas. The Bible says after the jailer believed with his family,

"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." (Acts 16:33). For Paul and Silas to have baptised the jailer at the same hour of the night without any delay informs us of the importance of baptism and that it ought to be done with urgency upon conversion. Many today procrastinate about baptism even though they believe. But it should not be so. We should be eager to get baptised the moment we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

This very important sacrament of baptism, as we are told, is an answer of a good conscience toward God. The conscience plays a very important role in our Christian life. We have different type of consciences and we shall look at them one after the other here.

The first is the weak conscience. 1 Corinthians 8:7 says, "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled." We can see here that the weak conscience is a conscience based on ignorance. A conscience that probably thinks that idols are gods indeed. So a conscience that lacks knowledge is a weak conscience.

There's also a strong conscience which we can read about in 1 Corinthians 8:10 which says, "For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols." So we see that a strong conscience is one that is based on knowledge.

Let me ask two questions. Question 1, in a case of which a guy is

very sensitive so much that he cannot sit with a lady and that if a lady comes into the room and sits next to him, he'd get up and find somewhere else to sit. What do you call that? Is that a weak conscience? Question 2; let's say a lady just comes into the room and sits on the guys lap, and it doesn't move him. Is that a strong conscience?

Many would tend to think that what the Bible is saying is that people like the person in the first case are those with weak consciences because he wouldn't allow himself to sit next to a lady, and people like the person in the second case are those with a strong conscience because even though she sits on his lap he is okay and probably doesn't feel pricked in his conscience.

Now the answer to the first question is that he does not have a weak conscience. Rather, he has a lively conscience and is being circumspect of which circumspection is a core Christian virtue (Exodus 23:13, Ephesians 5:15). The second however does not have a strong conscience. Rather, he probably doesn't have a conscience at all. This are the errors that people often make concerning this passage about the conscience. They think the more evil you can do without feeling guilty (probably on account of grace), the stronger your conscience, and those who can't bare the slightest moral wrong on their part are weak because they don't know the efficacy of grace. But that is far from what Paul is saying here.

I like how Paul explains it clearing referring to knowledge. The knowledge of the word of God. Because they know God's word does not forbid certain things, they express the liberty in such things. Such liberty as we can easily see must be exercised with caution for the sake of those who don't have this knowledge. In

this case, Paul gives an example of eating what belongs to idols. God revealed to Peter that he should not call unclean what God has made clean (Acts 10:10-16). Jesus himself clearly said that a man is not defiled by what enters the mouth but by what comes out of it (Mark 7:14-23). But people without these knowledge being weak eat it as a defiled thing. So a strong conscience does not mean when someone can do evil without feeling bad about it. But rather it is when someone knows the truth and is guided by it to walk in its liberty.

I can assure you that God accepts even those with a weak conscience. Even when you're ignorant but because of your love for God you still take heed to the demands of that conscience though it deprives you of those things which he does not forbid, God has respect for such obedience though it is not according to proper knowledge. But if your conscience is weak and you still go against that conscience God shall be displeased with you. This is because you're disobeying the voice of the conscience. And that is why it says in the verse we quoted above, "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled." (1 Corinthians 8:7). Further down it says, "For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (1 Corinthians 8:10-11). When a man becomes emboldened to go against his conscience, though there's nothing wrong in the action itself, he perishes.

Next is the defiled conscience. This we see being referred to in

verse 7 above with the words, "...and their conscience being weak is defiled." But let us take a look at Titus 1:15 which says, "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." This is talking about two categories of people, the impure and unbelieving. It says of the unbelieving that nothing is pure. They know their deeds are evil but they still go ahead not caring whether or not it is evil. Of such it says their minds and conscience is defiled. People who can't feel any guilt for any evil are those with a defiled conscience and God does not relate with such people.

Lastly, I'd like to talk about the seared conscience. This is a conscience that has been exercised to become insensitive. We see this in, "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). When a person is in the habit of ignoring the voice of his conscience, the end result is that the conscience becomes seared. In other words, it dies. It can no more respond to things around it whether good or bad. This is very true with those who preach heresy in hypocrisy and extort the poor and gullible. They know that what they do is wrong, but their consciences are now dead. They can't feel guilt. We have to be careful not to get our conscience seared. You don't have to be bent on evil, but a life of continual sin naturally leads to this. I consider such a person lost already while still in the flesh. But may God restore as many as are in such a state to himself in Jesus' name. Amen.

So we must have a lively conscience that is able to direct and pay good heed to it even when it is weak. Failure to do this would only earn us damnation.

1 John 3:20 says, "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." This is talking about our conscience. However, before I go on, let me point out something from the New Living Translation (NLT) which reads, "Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything." Now this is subtle way to tell us that the Bible is saying that we should ignore our conscience. Note the word, "even." So this is saying that we shouldn't be bothered when our conscience pricks us. According to NLT, when we feel guilty, we should ignore the guilt. On what grounds? Because God is greater than our conscience, and that by extension, it is saying our conscience isn't important. It therefore reduced the conscience to mere feelings. It is by this pitting our conscience against God. This is scandalous, evil and devilish. This is yet another reasons why these translations with contemporary English should be done away with by any Christian who wishes to make it to heaven. We mustn't allow ourselves to be deceived by them. They always have destructive elements in them that will surely turn us out of the way if we take heed to them.

For this reason, it is best for you to stick to the King James Bible. The English is hard but just continue reading it and you'd get to understand it by and by. It will help better than all these many modern translations. I believe that these new translations of the Bible are the Devil's handiwork to destroy Christians that seek to please God despite being saved and separated from the world.

Such a belief is hurtful to our spiritual growth because when we feel guilty and ought to amend our ways, we just ignore it and continue doing what we like causing God to further distance himself from us. But when we are sensitive to our conscience,

this will enable us to consistently keep working on improving our moral life because when we feel guilty we make amends to make sure that our life is right with God. We must seek for the root of the problem and make our ways right with God.

So if you read the NLT, you'd think that God wants you not to pay attention to the guilt you feel when you find yourself falling short of the commands of God (probably because of the atoning sacrifice of the death of Christ). But that is not so. The truth is found in the King James Bible which says, "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Meaning, if our conscience, being influenced by the littleness of our little knowledge condemns us, we should expect a greater condemnation from God who knows all things. So the condemnation we feel in our heart is a sign we must pay good heed to. For this reason, to the rational mind, what we are being admonished here is that we must take good and close heed to the voice of our conscience.

In the next verse it says, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." This time, note the word "then." By this we understand that apart from this feeling of commendation we have in our hearts when we do God's will, we shouldn't give ourselves false confidence. This commendation is the voice of a good and satisfied conscience. If our heart condemn us and we think that God is happy with us and his voice shall overrule that of the conscience, we do deceive ourselves. So our conscience serves as a inward vocal compass to our spirit guiding us in the right way and letting us know when we've left the mark. Now, how can we know the condemnation of our heart if we don't pay good heed to it? If we ignore our feelings of guilt as the NLT wants us to believe, how shall we know when it

condemns us and when it does not? Does not ignoring our conscience amount to spiritual suicide?

Another crime against our conscience is the faulty and wicked misquoting, misinterpretation, and misapplication of Revelations 12:10 which reads, "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night." So one big false accusation against the conscience, in misinterpreting this verse, is that it is the voice of the Devil condemning us. And people who put forward this argument tell you when you hear such voices that makes you feel guilty when you do wrong, "rebuke the Devil. Cast him out! Stab him in the head! Pour acid on his face!" And so on. They don't say it exactly that way though, but they say it with the same vehemence with which you'd expect a person to say such. This is becoming increasingly common nowadays.

Now if in misquoting Revelations 12:10, to mean if you're feeling guilty, it is the Devil that is accusing you and trying to make you feel guilty. What is this verse really saying? It is true that the Devil does accuse us, but to who? Us? No. Listen closely to what the Bible says about him, "...which accused them before our God day and night." He accuses us not to us but to God.

When the Devil appeared before God, God asked him, "hast thou considered my servant Job?" Job was so good that God was proud to put him forward. A good angel would probably have applauded Job and say, "Yeah, I've seen him. I know he's not perfect but he's pretty awesome. He's a great guy." But despite this, the Devil still accused him, alleging that he's goodness was not

founded on his love for God but on the prosperity with which God prospered him. He alleged that if God were to take these things away, he's going to curse God to his face. That is the example we can see of how the Devil accuses the saints.

So when your heart condemns you, never think it is the Devil. Yes, one may say the Devil moved the friends of Job to accuse him of evil doing, but that was with the voice of men and not the heart condemning him. So we must be clear on that. Rather than attributing such condemnation to the Devil, do some inward searching. Examine yourself and make things right with God. The Bible commands us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). You must ask yourself, "is there any way I have sinned against God? Is there any way I have missed it?" And in sincerity seek to answer these questions with the help of the Bible. A Christian who must live a life pleasing to God must consistently examine himself. And where he finds a fault, he must make it right with God by means of repentance, and let God help and restore him. We shall speak more on this later in this book.

The Devil will not come to you and accuse you to yourself. If the Devil comes to accuse you when you've gone wrong, that is the same thing as warning you. If that were so, we could call him our friend and ascribe to him the loving title, "Shepherd of Tender Youth," as one hymnist describes Christ. A shepherd who would come to tell you "this path is sinful, walk not in it," or "this path is pleasing to God, remain steadfast in it." But what business does the Devil have with warning you? Rather, he'd wish to encourage, and give you many excuses why what you've done isn't so bad after all. He'll want you to continue, then he'll creep to God to accuse you vehemently.

Another thing that we need to know about the conscience is that it does not listen to any appeal to be silent apart from reason. I read a book on the History of the English reformation in which the writer made reference to a book titled "The Visions of Piers the Plowman" by William Langland. In that book, William Langland said many things about conscience, presenting it as a man. He wrote that the king pressed the conscience to take gifts, money, fame, power and other coveted things, of him so as to make the conscience to be pacified, but the conscience flatly refused to accept these things as a means of being pacified. After long entreaties, the conscience finally says, "let reason advise me or rather I die." By this the author beautifully explains to us that the only voice that can appease your conscience without killing it is the voice of reason.

Let us take the case of a person eating food offered to idols now, if a person comes to the knowledge of the truth of Christ how that he said, "...whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" (Mark 7:18-19), if he had eaten a food offered unto idols and someone informs him, he won't feel guilty for the voice of reason shall remind him of what the Lord said. That way the conscience can be appeased and that without dying.

But when instead of allowing reason to appease the conscience, and where there's no reason for doing what we have done, we start feeding the conscience with excuses thinking that excuses are a good substitute to the voice of reason, the conscience dies. This is because reason and excuses are two different things entirely and excuses can never be a substitute for reason. We ought not to feed our conscience with excuses, instead we've done

wrong, let us acknowledge it, feel contrite for it and make our ways right with God.

Now excuses can be mistaken for reason, and for this reason, we have to be very careful when we try to give reason for our actions. Understanding the reason for something is very simple. If you step on a nail and you begin to bleed, the reason why you're bleeding is because you stepped on a nail. If you become drowsy and fall asleep, the reason why you're sleeping is because your body needs rest. These are simple reasons, but let us take for example, in the constitution of Nigeria, and probably every nation in the world, self defence is legitimate and if you kill someone in the act of self defence it is not considered murder and you're not guilty of a crime. What that means is if you're attacked by an assailant, who probably wants to kill you, and in defending yourself he dies, you are not guilty of a crime. In fact you did well. So let us assume that a man was standing by the road side, probably waiting for a cab, and a woman being offended for some strange reason started attacking him with her handbag. He told her to stop but she didn't, so he pulled out a machete and chopped off her head calling it self defence. Can we say that is self defence indeed?

Did she attack him? Yes. Did he provoke the attack? No. So why can't we call that self defence? It is easy for any to judge rightly that that is not self defence despite all that. But giving tangible reason why it is not self defence can be a bit tricky. For this reason, in approaching such a case, the court would have to take a look at the weapons of attack before being able to know if it was indeed an act of self defence or murder, for the same law that grants you the right to defend yourself also says in self defence, the weapon of self defence must be comensurate to that

of the assailant. So where a person attacks you with a handbag and you choose to chop off her head with a machete, that is murder. Had it been that what she attacked him with was a matchet, a gun, or other lethal weapons, then the appeal of self defence would have been substantial.

The reason why the law says the weapon of self defence must be commensurate to that of the assailant is because they want to be able to differentiate an excuse from reason. To do this, it is necessary to have such a substantial mechanism to be able to determine if self defence is only used as an excuse for murder lest men abuse the good law.

Yes, this is a complex one, but the same way people could use the right of self defence as an excuse for murder people also pick things from scriptures as an excuse for sin. They'd say, "well, the Bible didn't say this, and the Bible didn't say that, so what could be wrong with it?" And with flimsy excuses they go ahead in their wayward way to do evil. But just as the law has means by which it could determine whether something is self defence or not, the same way the Bible has things by which we can know whether something is an excuse or a reason.

Take for example, the issue of women covering their heads while praying. Many people misinterpret the Bible when they quote 1 Corinthians 11:15, which says "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." They say that when the Bible says in an earlier verse "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven." (1 Corinthians 11:5), it does not mean that it is wrong if a woman prays without headress. This they say because, in

verse 15 quoted above, the Bible also says her hair is given to her for a covering. This is the excuse women have today for not covering their hair. But by what mechanism can we judge if this is an excuse or a reason. If the hair is the covering Paul referred to for women, then the hair is the covering by which a man must not be covered when he prays, for it says, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head." (1 Corinthians 11:4). For this reason, if the hair is the covering the Bible is speaking of here, then it is a sin for a man to pray if his head is not shone like Stone Cold. We as men must continuously scrape our heads if we must pray without sinning against God. Of course you can see what a daft argument they have to claim that the hair is the covering that the Bible is instructing us about here. So we can see that verse 15 is used as an excuse for disobedience and not a reason for the purported well doing.

The list of excuses in the modern day church goes on. Do we talk about using of jewellery, make up, worldly dressing, etc. When you go feeding your conscience with excuses, you only end up killing it. This is what William Langland meant by his parable. It is only reason that can still the voice of the conscience without killing it. Nothing else can. Ignoring it or rebuking it can't. Not even giving excuses for wrongdoing can. While ignoring it and rebuking kills the conscience violently, feeding it with excuses kills it quietly. So quietly you won't know it's dead. Very many Christians are walking about with consciences they've killed so quietly so much that they don't know it's dead. And it is the ministry of many so called pastors, like abortionist doctors, to help kill your conscience quietly by their sermons and put it away.

We must not also be in the habit of shifting blame when we do

wrong. A friend of mine gave an example saying, when someone gets a A grade and you ask him of his result, he'll tell you proudly, "I made an A." However if he gets an F, he'll say, "they gave me an F." This exposes the bad proclivity of man to never own up to anything that discredit him. We saw it in Adam and Eve, the first humans, and we still can see it all around us in men today. But as Christians preparing for the second coming of the Lord, we shouldn't find it hard to accept blames for our wrongs. For the fact that this trait is a natural part of us reveals to us that accepting blame for our wrongdoings is something that won't become our habit naturally, but we must consciously learn to do so. There's no way we can make the wrongs right if we won't first own up to our faults. So please, when you do something wrong and your conscience pricks you, take heed and amend yourself. Without doing this you cannot maintain a good stand with God and you cannot be prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must make sure that we maintain a right and clean conscience before God. A conscience free from all defilement. So anything you do, no matter what it is, that causes your heart to condemn you must be repented of. No being dodgy. We must listen to it and let it break us so that God can remould us.

In the course of teaching the Bible study in which I presented these things about the conscience, I was asked, what if a person have repented and that guilt persist? In answering that we need to know that the conscience always has its demands and that demand is reason. If you feel guilty that you have sinned against God, and that God says in his word that you are forgiven, what power does the conscience have left to condemn you. It shall no longer condemn but rather commend you if the repentance is

true and deep. It takes someone who is ignorant of the written word to feel guilty in a circumstance where God has forgiven him.

Another thing we need to know is that it is not everything that is called repentance that is truly repentance. Some people only feel sorry and call that repentance. It is not feeling sorry that can restore our relationship back to God, it is contrition. The Bible says, "... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17). We see that it is contrition that can restore us back to God. If the conscience still condemns you, it is because you haven't been restored to a right standing with God, and restoration to a right standing with God can only be done through contrition.

Now contrition is not just remorse but painful remorse. It is a feeling of deep regret that hurts you deeply for your misdeeds. Take away the painful side of contrition and that is no more contrition. It is such a feeling that can restore us back to God. With such a state of heart, while we may think that God is far away because of our wrongs, if only we shall be contrite, God shall come to us for we see that for merely being broken hearted and contrite, God is near you. That is why the Bible says, "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psalms 35:18).

In Psalm 51, David also says, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit." (Psalm 51:12). David lost his joy upon the realisation of his sin. The contrition and remorse you feel that does not take away your joy is not contrition at all. And it is God that can restore that joy of your salvation. All other joy restored by other means apart from God

are all counterfeit.

We must not for any reason try to cheer ourselves up by means of false comforts. That would be like trying to lift ourselves from our woe. Rather we find what we are to do where James wrote, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." (James 4:8 - 10). He didn't say we should console ourselves, rather he says we should be afflicted and mourn, we should weep, and turn our laughter to mourning and our joy to heaviness. What is our part to do is to throw away those other comforts by deliberately putting aside laughter and joy, and in their place have mourning and heaviness. Such are we commanded to do. When we humble ourselves this way, God himself will lift us up. Usually people still feel guilty when they repent because it was devoid of humbling ourselves this way. But when we do humble ourselves indeed, God by himself, not ourselves, shall lift us up. You don't need to wrestle with any guilt, rather God himself shall take it away and fill our hearts with that sweet joy of our salvation.

Now making your ways right with God does not just mean saying, "I'm sorry for what I've done," but it also entails taking positive steps and making resolutions never to go back to what you have done again. This does not of course mean that if you fail to keep your resolution you should give up. You must persist and maintain a good fight against whatever temptation that is besetting you. In such cases, you may have to delete some contacts of friends who you know are always dragging you back to that way of sin, you may need to break some relationships,

burn some books, etc. Make sure that whatsoever is constituting a barrier between you and God is put out of the way. That is how to make your ways right with God, and not by merely saying you're sorry. When you have a true and deep contrition, the conscience will cease to condemn you and begin to commend you.

It is also noteworthy that making your ways right with God does not have anything to do with confessing to anyone as the Roman Catholics do. Some say even if it is not needed to confess your sins to others it is good to still do so since it helps the conscience, but I can assure you that the comfort you get from confessing to others is also, like giving excuses, a false comfort. If you've wronged someone, you should admit to them and express remorse about that of course, but this is quite different from confessing your sins to any other apart from God. Some like to misquote the verse that says, "Confess your faults one to another..." (James 5:16). This does not say we should confess our sins one to another, rather it referred to faults. Now faults and sin are two things that differ one from the other. The Old Covenant God made with the children of Israel for example was not sinful, yet God found fault with it (Hebrews 8:7-8). We are in no way commanded to confess sins to one another. To this agrees John Chrysostom (349-407), Archbishop of Antioch, who said, "I say not to you that you should disclose yourself in public, nor that you accuse yourself before others, but I would have you obey the prophet who says: 'Disclose thy self before God.' Therefore confess your sins before God, the true Judge, with prayer. Tell your errors, not with the tongue, but with the memory of your conscience..."

There are also times when though you have been forgiven and you know you've been forgiven, yet when you think of your past

you feel this remorse. In such a case such remorse is not a bad thing. It is not the condemnation of the conscience but the painful feeling felt for past faults. This is due to fact that one wished that he had been perfect earlier on. All holy men, especially those who got converted rather late in life feel this way. In such cases, rather than feeling bad, one should turn a heart of gratitude to God for saving him from such a life because he can truly say, "the things I used to do, I do them no more, by God's grace."

So when our conscience, whether you classify it as weak or strong, is against something we wish to do and we still go ahead to do it, that is disobedience. Taking heed to the voice of your conscience is very important to us as Christians. When Jesus says take heed, we've talked about taking heed to the voice of God (written and spoken), and very important also is the voice of the conscience. Where it condemns us, let us repent and make our ways right with God. In preparing for the coming of the Lord we must never ignore this precious voice of the conscience.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, I know that the evil ones want us to ignore the very important voice of our conscience, but your true word makes it clear that we must not ignore it. Help us o God and Lord to always take careful heed to the voice of the conscience without giving excuses. Help us to maintain a conscience that is satisfied with our doings being in accordance to your will. This I ask in Jesus' gracious name. Amen.

SECTION 3

KEEPING WATCH

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KEEP WATCH?

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth..."
(Revelation 16:15)

Now what does it mean to watch? To watch means to look at, see, view, observe a particular thing for a period of time. It also means to mind, attend, guard, or to be alert. To be wary or cautious of something. To be vigilant. Watching, as we can see, is also very broad, but key to all these is that all these things mentioned can only be done when fully awake and conscious. We shall come to that again later.

While all these things are right about watching, we shall look at it contextually. What did Jesus mean when he said watch?

We built a library in my local church trying to encourage teenagers to read, but in the library were also "Christian" movies. The movies were all borrowed before we could say, "Jack Robinson." Why? They wanted to watch. They didn't do it trying to fulfil the commandment of Christ, but could we say this act of watching movies is also part of what Christ meant? We see people who are occupied with Mount Zion Movies and other movies of other producers of "Christian" movies. And probably after watching these movies, they'd pray and pray and pray. But what Jesus meant was not Mount Zion movies or other

"Christian" movies, or watching news. Not Telemondo and not Zee World. Rather the contextual meaning of watch as Jesus meant here is keeping guard. Being alert. Being very concious to the changes around you and being responsive to the stimuli around you. This is what Jesus meant.

Watching is also being sensitive to the things happening around you to enable you be proactive. There are two ways to respond to things. Either you are reactive or proactive. In being reactive you wait for things to happen before you respond. For example waiting for a building to collapse before you start seeking to save lives. In being proactive you act ahead of the occurrence. For example, when you see signs in a building that it is likely to collapse so you do what it takes to prevent it from collapsing. This can only happen when you "pay close attention" to relevant signs which enables you to foretell what is likely to happen. As Christians we need to be proactive. Why? You can't save your soul after going to Hell so the only way to being saved is to act to save yourself before going to hell. Reactivity can't avail you anything when it comes to the battle for your souls.

In Luke 12:39-40 where we receive the same command to watch. We hear Jesus Christ telling us to watch as if watching against a thief. You see, when you watch against a thief, you suspect every sound you hear because you are very alert. Even if it is a rat that passes by, it attracts your suspicion, then when you realise it is just a rat you keep your calm again. That is what it means to watch. To be on your guard.

In order to be prepared, we must be spiritually alert. All our spiritual senses must be fully alert to every spiritual stimulus. There should be no dull moment of idleness by which we could be

lulled into a state of drowsiness and slumber. That dull moment in which you let your defences to be compromised may be the time the Master shall return and find you sleeping.

An instance that we can see in the Bible about what can happen when we sleep is found in Matthew 13:24-25 which says, "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." Such an evil could only have happened while men slept. An evil that to attempt to reverse it would be more injurious than to leave it and allow it thrive.

An important precaution to take is to keep ourselves awake and alert is to keep ourselves in constant reminder of the word of God. You must consistently read your Bible extensively from day to day. You know there's a posture you'd take that you are bound to sleep off even when you have the intention and try very hard to stay awake. If someone has the intention to read for hours and lies on his bed, he's not likely to stay awake for long. That is how it is when you don't read your Bible adequately and expect to be spiritually awake and alert. In fact if you stop reading your Bible adequately, you'll end up in a spiritual coma. If you must stay awake, you must take a good posture that won't let you sleep. You must sit up. Same way it is spiritually. There are postures that you must take to be spiritually alive, awake, and alert, and that is by continuous regular study of the word of God and prayer.

Everybody should endeavour to watch out for themselves. It is risky to rely on others to keep guard for you. What if he sleeps off too? No body places what is valuable to them into wrong hands.

Charles Seeth in his wonderful book titled "A Christian In A Non-Christian World," expresses this fact well in a story that goes;

"Once upon a time, a rich man put an advertisement for a chauffeur to drive his car. Three men responded and came for interview. Each of them was asked exactly the same question by the rich man: "How close can you drive to the edge of a cliff?" The first man interviewed said, "I can drive so well that I can drive the car one foot away from the edge of the cliff." The second man, not to be outdone, said, "My driving skill is so good that I can drive just one inch away from the edge of the cliff." But when the third man was asked this, he replied, "I will drive as far away from the edge of the cliff as possible!" Well I think you can guess who got the job – the third man."

That tells us that no body would entrust what they value into the hands of someone that shall take senseless risks with them. But it is very painful to see that people are willing to take senseless risks with their souls despite the high eternal price that is at stake. We must do our own watching by reading the Bible regularly for ourselves as well as spend quality time for personal prayer, this ought to be done rather than taking senseless risks of relying on others not matter how vibrant they are in their walk with God.

We must be able to help one another, but we must pay careful attention to our ownelves. That is why Paul wrote saying, "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." Though he was an apostle going everywhere and labouring for the saints, first to convert people to Christ, and

labour with much pain to keep them strong and fruitful in the faith. But he still says he doesn't lose focus on his own self in terms of discipline lest after he has preached to others, he himself should be a castaway.

It is very shameful to lecture people on how to make money yet you yourself are in poverty. You teach people on academic success and when, for the intelligence of your teaching, people begin to have great expectations about you only to fail woefully. That is what Paul was trying to avoid. So we must pay careful attention to ourselves to make sure that we are standing in the faith. Don't put your eternal destiny in the hands of another.

We need to understand the importance we should place on our eternal destinies. The most important thing is that it is eternal. There are two things that makes our eternal destinies very precious. The first is not making it to a place as glorious as heaven. Even if you don't go to hell this is already a torment on its own. The second is going to hell. I spoke on this two things extensively in my book titled, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE," in the chapter, "THE GLORY AND EXCELLENCY OF THE CROSS." And I don't expect to go deep into it here. You can download it for free in both audio and ebook version. Just visit www.crystalframes.com.ng/stores and search for "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE."

So we can't afford to lose heaven for any reason. Our eternal destiny must not be gambled with. We can't leave it in the hands of others whether in the hands of individual Christians or to the church as a body. Let us even assume that the church is so vibrant and is able to guide us aright that we cannot miss the mark, the words of knowledge in her sermons are so powerful,

and her revelations mind blowing, that you now fold your hands and say "well we can allow the church to watch for us, I needn't bother myself..." We mustn't take such risk. We must be on our guard personally and do all that we can on our own to make sure that we are ready.

If we know that someone is always interceding for us doesn't mean we should leave off praying. If the church is so pure in doctrine and preaching of the word doesn't mean we should stop reading our Bibles for ourselves. Everything that will make us to be spiritually alert must be done personally by your own self. You can watch for others but not at the expense of your own self. To leave your eternal destiny in the hands of another for any reason at all (whether good or bad) is to be reckless.

As I explained in my book, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE," one of the most frightening thing about eternity is the duration of time. It is not one year, two years, ten years, or one thousand years. It is forever and ever. The writer of *Amazing Grace*, John Newton, expresses it this way, "when we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began." Now look at it the other way. After spending ten thousand years in the torments of hell, what despair and torment would fill the mind of the tormented to remember that he still has no less days to spend there than when he first began. That's horrible.

So look at the things before us. Look at the realities of eternity. Are you willing to be reckless when such great things are at stake? Are you really willing to gamble with things with such great and dire consequences? Nothing in this life is worth your eternal destiny. We mustn't jeopardise our eternity with little

things of this world. We must sacrifice them to maintain a steady walk with God to ensure that we are alert and ready all times while we await his coming.

So we must be sensitive to the doctrines that are becoming popular, we must be cautious of even the trends in fashion, we must be cautious about the system of the world around us and see how these things affect our lives and respond in an adequate way to ensure that they don't sweep us away.

For example when the menace of same sex marriage was causing a lot of worry, how did Christians respond? It was sad to see some churches start ordaining gay pastors and all that nonsense. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury openly said that God accepts homosexuals. I know such hypocrites would always allude to the doctrine of grace. They did such horrendous damage to the church because, as fools, they preferred to be accepted by the world rather than by God. They had become stars and celebrities of the world and were afraid of criticism. The world had become more dear to them than the church and God himself. These were very pathetic to behold. This is a very bad way to respond to the change of moral value in the world. The church ought to have stood firm and opposed such wickedness to the last.

We may experience such horrible things in the church but we must be very careful about our personal lives. Let the leaders of the church lead the church astray if they will. They shall give account to God. But you watch diligently for your own souls. To ensure that you don't get carried away by trends, doctrinal shifts, compromise on all fronts, etc. We must make sure that we watch against these things to enable us know what to do so that

these forces don't affect our walk with God negatively. Secondly, we must watch for the sake of others. We must try to see how we can lend a helping hand to those who are being swept away by these forces. This requires a lot of work and bearing a lot of burdens. But the souls of those we save is worth far more than that.

Luke 12:39-40 says, "And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." We see the sense in which Jesus Christ uses the word "watch." He says if the person had known what hour the thief would come, let's say he knew it would be by 3:00am, he would have set alarm for 2:30am. But now he doesn't know what time of the night he's coming so he mustn't sleep at all. He must watch all through the night. Same with us. We don't know what hour he's coming so we must be ready throughout our lives to ensure that we are not caught unawares. We must be ready for any occasion that can arise to the hurt of our souls and be prepared to repel them.

In such a case, being awake is not all it takes. If the thief is coming, you make sure that you arm yourself sufficiently to resist him when he does appear. So we should be on our guard at all times, we should ensure we are active making sure that we are taking heed to all that has been commanded us.

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." So we must watch, be vigilant, and arm ourselves if we must be ready for the coming of the Lord.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I see that we must be watchful, awake, and sensitive if we must be prepared for the coming of your dear Son. Help us to busy ourselves in reading of your word, prayer, and those other things by which we shall maintain a watchful and sensitive disposition as we wait for the coming of your dear Son. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

KEEPING WATCH AGAINST YOURSELF

*"Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart."
(Psalm 26:2)*

A man was heard praying, "Lord, deliver me from all my enemies, and above all, from that bad man—myself." When a man speaks this way, you'd think at first he's going to call the very bad man one of the beasts we read about in Revelations and in the Book of Daniel, only to say that he meant himself and how right he is. It may surprise you, but the first and foremost thing you must watch against is yourself. That is the number one enemy, the very worst enemy that you have.

Why is that so? It is you who wishes to be proud. Pride is evil. Pride is what made the Devil rebel against God, yet it is you who still wishes to be proud. It is you who does not want to pray. It is you whose heart is evil and desperately wicked. So you don't need to focus so much on the Devil, his host, the witches and wizards in your village, etc. They should be watched against of course, but you're the first person to watch against. For this reason we are commanded to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). Not the Devil, not his hosts, not the unbelievers, but yourself. The Devil and all his host can do only little or nothing. Not that you should watch against yourself to harm yourself, but what you must watch against is what lies within and what comes

out of you. For Jesus says those are the things that can defile a man. This defilement, the Devil, his host, all witches and wizards, and their enchantments, can't have effect in your life. But you can.

When the Bible says we should examine ourselves, it means looking inwards, not outwards, to see if our ways are in accordance to God's word and will. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). This is an injunction for us and any Christian that must prevail, that must overcome in life's struggle, must examine himself regularly and sincerely. We've talked about the voice of the conscience and by it we know that self examination is natural trait of a person who seeks to maintain a good conscience. When the Bible says "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith..." it goes to show us that you could be very well out of the faith and still think you are, as many people today do deceive themselves. When you look at their lives, you know they're dead, but they still think they're in the faith. But if you don't want to be self deceived like them, you must examine yourself. There's no other way of not deceiving yourself than by means of continual examination of yourself with the word of God and prayer. Don't be so careless, reckless, and self deceived to think saying, "well, so far I'm going to church, so far as I'm answering a Christian name, so far I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, I am in the faith." The Bible tells us that even demons believe (James 2:19), and I can assure you that they believe more than you do. They don't doubt like you do. They know Jesus, they've been with him in heaven, and that is why we read throughout the Gospel that the evil spirits knew him well, but the people about him, who are mere men like we

are, had no clue of who he was. For this reason, we on our part are only hearing about him and through that hearing, the Holy Spirit compels us to believe. So they know him far more than we do and do believe with a belief that is free of the doubts that plague our feeble minds. But Jesus still says blessed are we who believe despite having not seen him. If this is the case with demons, what makes you think that because you believe in Jesus alone, bearing a Christian name, or going to church, you're going to escape the eternal fire they're destined for despite their believing more than you?

We therefore must examine ourselves carefully. We must look for the marks of a true Christian. What are those things that make a Christian? Are they really found in us? Are we really living the life of a true Christian, of a true child of God? How closely does our life compare with Jesus'? When we take a look at Christ, is our life fashioned after him? We must ask ourselves the question Moses asked the children of Israel in Exodus 32:26, but rather in a personalised way. We ought to ask ourselves, "am I on the Lord's side?" We ought to give an honest answer to it considering our actions. If we tell lies, can we say we're on the side of God, or the world, or the Devil? Is not the Devil the father of lies? When, rather than read our Bible and pray, we prefer entertainment, and if we spend our time reading and pursuing good grades at the expense of our relationship with God, can we say we're on the Lord's side? When we live in sin to satisfy the cravings of the flesh, can we say we're on the Lord's side? Are we not on the world's side? Is not the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life inimical to God? How can we do those things that are inimical to God and say we're on his side?

We must look inwardly carefully and circumspectly, considering

these things, not just at our conduct but at our motives also. Do our motives reflect the virtues of Christ? When we do a good work in the service of God, say we come early to church to clean the chairs, yes that's a good work and we thank God for that, but what is it that motivates us to do that good work? Is it because we want people to applaud us and say, "wow, that brother is so humble, we like the fact that he always comes early to clean the chair"? Are our motives right or are we merely seeking pride? Is the motive of our good work springing from the evil of pride? If we use the word of God to search our hearts we shall be able to detect pride and deal with it before it kills us. So when we do a good work, because of our fallen nature, it often has an underlying motive of an evil origin. Because these things are not glaring, we can't easily know them, we must therefore carefully examine ourselves regularly.

You must know that in the Christian race you cannot rely on others to keep a watchout for you. You may be privileged to have people who will diligently watch for you. There have been days when I have been weak and slumbering, and God showed me a man who was interceding for me going and whose prayers kept the Devil at bay in my life. I was lucky at that time to have such a person interceding, else the Devil could have swept me away. Peter too was weak as we can clearly see in Matthew 16:41-42, "And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." But how did he survive? Here, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not..." (Luke 22:31-32). We shall still talk on this when we shall focus on prayer in a much

later chapter, but here we see that Peter was lucky to have Jesus watching unto prayer for him. The same way we can be lucky to have some vibrant Christian whose intercession can keep the Devil away and unable to conquer us. But we can't rely on this brethren. This is very risky to do.

A.W. Tozer told a story of a very prominent preacher who shamed all his equals. His life and deep knowledge of God was unequaled both in devotion and doctrine. He was highly respected of all. One day few of his fellow preachers found him alone and in a sober and contrite way. When they inquired about what was going on in his mind, he said to them that he was going back to Ireland [he being in the US at the time] and would spend six months there placing himself before the judgment seat of God while there's something to do about it. That is a Christian who really wants to go to heaven. We must follow his example because it is now that we can make amends. It is now that we must keep judging ourselves by the standard of the word to see if we're standing or not. It certainly, most certainly, would be useless to examine ourselves at the judgment throne of God. Eternity is not what one will take lightly the way many today are taking it. We must judge ourselves while there's hope for repentance or else we shall be judged of him and at that time there shall be no chance for repentance. It is better for us to judge ourselves than for God to judge us. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (1 Corinthians 11:31).

Percy Dearmer (1867-1936), an English liturgist, wrote in his hymn the following words,

*"Search, Lord, our spirits in Thy sight,
In best and worst reveal us;*

*Shed on our souls a blaze of light,
And judge, that Thou may'st heal us.
The present be our judgment day,
When all our lack Thou dost survey:
Show us ourselves and save us."*?

If we must meet that day without regret, everyday must be a judgment day for us. We must continuously judge ourselves to see if we're standing. So we must look less at the outer things and begin to focus on inner things. Things such as the devil, his hosts, etc. are quite insignificant to us, for these things have no power over us as Christians. The only things that can harm us are the things we allow of ourselves to thrive in us. These things are what defile us and can stop us from being prepared for the coming of the Lord.

Psalms 4:4 says, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah." This, I believe, talks about a good way to examine ourselves. We therefore should take it as an advice. When we lie on our bed to sleep, we shouldn't just rush to the snoring realms, rather, we ought to lie quietly and replay our life and consider all we've done from the beginning of the day till night. We ought to think of all we've done through the day. Our actions, the things we said, the places we went to, etc. How many of them were honourable before God? How many of them really reflected the nature of God, His holiness, his love, his kindness, his patience, etc. How many of them really reflected the virtues that spring forth from his word? Where we find that we've done a good work, we should consider also the motive of it. Did our motive really reflect humility, selflessness, compassion for others? We should consider all these things and ask ourselves, using the word of God as a standard,

"were these things pleasing to God." Right there on our bed, we should make our ways right before God, in true repentance and contrition, in places where we couldn't meet up to what is worthy of our Christian calling. We should make resolutions about how we'd never go back to those things that must have displeased God.

Nothing kills a Christian better than insincerity. When a Christian can't be sincere with himself, when he begins to give excuses for every wrong doing, when he always tries to commend himself unjustly, there's no way such can excel as a Christian. Where we find ourselves falling short of our calling, we must admit that we're wrong and make our ways right. There's no way we can be ready for the second coming of the Lord if we don't consistently watch against these things in absolute sincerity. No way.

Go through the life history of any triumphant Christian, you won't see perfection but absolute sincerity. Though the outward world sees them as such saints, yet before their God they were plain and honest about their faults and shortcomings. Aurelius Augustine was such a stalwart of a Bishop that I define him as the paragon of a good and worthy Bishop. He was so saintly, super intelligent, hardworking, evidently humble, pious, and adored by everyone. Even those he opposed and who opposed him acknowledged his piety and high devotion to God. In one of such circumstances, his adversary heaped many praises on him, but his response was [paraphrased], "look, thank you very much for this your praises, but you should rather pray for me that I'd be the kind of person that you say I am..." This means first that he did not accept such praise, in his sincerity he did not consider himself to be what others thought he was, and he acknowledged

that only God could raise a man to such a state of perfection. Despite all the virtues of this man, someone who overheard him praying and confessing his sins and faults before God said you'd think he's the worst sinner the world has ever known. This is the same with all the saints down the years. To the world they were envied for their piety, yet in their sincerity they were vile to themselves before God. Not that they were worse or even close to badness as others, but they were far more sincere than those. Like we can see in the lives of the saints of old, key to living a triumphant Christian life and being ready for the second coming of the Lord is absolute sincerity.

We must be able to take the word of God like a torch and search our heart, so that you can be able to know where pride is rising up and kill it. So that we can see where hatred is springing up and kill it. So that we can see where any other vice is springing up and deal with it at the root. The word of God, like a torch, will help us to search our heart and to see these things clearly. For "The entrance of thy words giveth light..." (Psalm 119:130). We must not rely on our own judgment when conducting a self examination. For this reason the psalmist also wrote, "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." (Psalm 26:2). Here he invites God to help examine and prove him. So examining ourselves with the word of God as a standard would help us detect these things so that we can kill them before they kill us.

The practice of self examination is so important that we're advised to do it before partaking in the Lord's Supper as it is written, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." (1 Corinthians 11:28). Selwyn Hughes likened this to a self operation of which you take yourself

to a theatre and perform an operation on yourself. Any Christian who must be ready for the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ must one who examines each and every moment.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I pray for your help to examine me and that I myself shall make it a regular practice to examine myself. As I do this, let no evil go unspotted in my life. Let me detect them right early and deal effectively with it at the root. May I be ready for the coming of your dear Son when he does come. This I ask in Jesus' matchless name. Amen.

[Proverbs 14:8, "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit."]

KEEPING WATCH AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."

(1 John 2:18)

We all know even from the name that the Antichrist is opposed to Christ. Anti simply means opposed to or against. So the Antichrist is chiefly against Christ. If Christ's goal is our salvation, then we can be certain that the goal of the Antichrist is our damnation. If Christ's will is that we should be ready when he does return, we can be sure that the will of the Antichrist is that we should be caught napping when Christ returns. So whatever Christ wills is what the Antichrist opposes. By this knowledge we shall be able to know the Antichrist. By the proper knowledge of Christ, we shall have the proper knowledge of the Antichrist too.

Though the Antichrist is very well known by many, there are many misconceptions about him. These misconceptions often come from these people that like to foretell future events. They pick verses from the Bible and jumble it up and confuse everybody.

The key power of the Antichrist is his ability to deceive. I read a novel titled "Scarlet Pimpernel," which was a story of some adventurous rescues carried out by the Scarlet Pimpernel during the French Revolution (though I'm not sure if it is a true life story). This man was so clever in his disguises that one of the people sent to find him intercepted a letter that told his comrades exactly the time and place he was going to be should they need to see him. This man going to the place at the exact time stated in the letter and finding only one man in the room, the Scarlet Pimpernel himself, yet he left angrily that he had been deceived by the letter. The Scarlet Pimpernel did not just disguise his looks, he also disguised his personality. People would think such a daring hero would be this very serious looking and watchful man. But the Scarlet Pimpernel acted like a loose clown every time except when disguised to embark on a rescue mission. He was known by his real identity as a big comedian so no one ever suspected that this comedian was the brave hero of Europe. So while the bad guys were busying themselves looking for one very secretive, watchful, serious, and stone faced guy, the loose comedian by their side was walking about freely executing all the rescue missions he wanted. Not even his wife knew that her embarrassing comedian of a husband is the much admired hero of Europe till the very last adventure of the novel.

If you read the novel you'd marvel at the dexterity by which he deceives and outwits people, but this deception of the Scarlet Pimpernel is little, very little, compared to that of the Antichrist. So his power to deceive is great, and this is because in deception, like the Scarlet Pimpernel, he never appears the way an antichrist would. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the

life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). If this is the proclamation of the Christ, if the Antichrist is sincere, what do you think his confession would be? It shall be, "I am barrier and hinderance, I am the lie and deception, I am the death..." Chief of these qualities of his is deception. That is why 2 John 1:7 says, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

Ephesians 6:11 says, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11). What do you understand by wile? According to Merriam Webster wile means, "a trick or stratagem intended to ensnare or deceive." So wile is all about deception. Now if the Bible is telling us to put on the WHOLE armour of God against the deception of the Devil, that is to tell you how great that deception is.

There's a lot the Devil could achieve through lies just like the Scarlet Pimpernel achieved a lot by hiding his personality. Had it been he had no power to deceive, there's very little he could achieve. You know the Devil has his boys that he knows that they're certainly going to be in hell with him, but he's not satisfied with them, he also wants you (a Christian) to be with him in hell. Now how do you think he's going to approach you? Now, you believe in Jesus, you believe and try to live according to the Bible, do you think he's going to send a herbalist or the grand master of a renowned cult to you? Do you think his going to send a native doctor with all those beads and demonic books in his hand, and those body marks to tell you to forsake Christ? No! He won't send these guys, he's not that stupid. Rather he'd send someone that would disguise himself as someone that is worthy of your trust, and that way seek to draw you away from Christ.

There are some Christians actually, that the Devil can approach with a Jezebel, a seductive woman, and that person will fall from the faith. But usually, since the Devil knows that most Christians would be on guard against these obviously sinful snares of his, he will come to you with something that would win your "holy trust." So, he'll come to you with preachers, he'll come as well meaning and humble "Christians," and they'd pretend to love the Lord and to know his will, then they'd begin to introduce certain heresies here and there to deceive. The Devil does not care whether you're far off the track, or close to the track, so far you're off the track. So he doesn't need great heresies. He's content with those little and seemingly acceptable heresies. This he does because when you get to the gate of heaven, it is only those on the track that shall go in. Those off the track shall only hit the wall and fail to go in.

We have to know that the Antichrist is pervading every sphere of human existence, both financial, political, educational, entertainment, religion, and what have you, even including the church. Take for example the educational sphere, when they teach you Biology, what do they tell you is the origin of man? Ape! That is the work of the spirit of the Antichrist. This is the same with every other sphere. You can see the movement and the operations of the spirit of the Antichrist at work.

The Bible tells us clearly how we can know the spirit of the Antichrist. 1 John 4:2-3 says, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even

now already is it in the world." It is the chief of the deception of the Antichrist to make us believe that he is a person thus making us to watch out for a person rather than to watch for the anti-Christian working of his evil spirit. It is for this reason that I titled this chapter, "KEEPING WATCH AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST," taking care to point to the fact that he is more a spirit than a person. Of course he shall work through people, but it is the spirit doing the work in them that is the Antichrist.

The renowned Nicean ecumenical council of elders held to resolve what is known as the Arian controversy. This controversy was started by a heretic by the name of Arius who alleged that Jesus was not God and was subject to change like every other creature. After the council, it was concluded that Arius was the servant of the Devil himself. He was banished, his doctrines anathematised, and his foolish writings burnt, and when through hypocrisy he sought to join himself again to the church with the backing of Emperor Constantine, he died miserably. He was indeed a servant of the Devil decisively dealt with, but the Anti-Christian spirit working in him keeps steering up new adversaries to the Christian church and her doctrines such as the Unitarians, Sevent Day Adventist, Word of Faith Movement, etc. It would have been wholly foolish to conclude that Arius was the Antichrist, but the spirit of the Antichrist worked in him to greatly trouble the church, though it ended up strengthening the church far more greatly than it troubled her.

The same way we have Gnosis which is the false belief in the ability to reach an altered state of mind of which the will is magically effective. It is an ancient belief that attributes power to the mind, that with the mind you can control things around

you. Sounds very magical and occultic, right? But how many books today do you see talking about the power of the mind. They could come with titles such as, "The Power of Positive Thinking." They even present this belief in some so called Christian books with titles such as, "The Power of Faith," or "Faith in Action." These sort of books that talk on harnessing the so called power of the mind are becoming so popular. Many false preachers and so called Christian motivational authors talk about and publish books about such foolish belief even bringing verses out of the Bible and misapplying them. But this is by that same spirit of the Antichrist that originated it as a magical art in the ancient world that is now trying to introduce it into the Christian faith. Such argument may seem harmless, but is it not quite surprising that they seek to take power away from God and bestow it on the mind (not even the muscles) of a mortal. Yet we know, "power belongeth unto God" (Psalm 62:11), not the mind.

From 1 John 4:2-3, we can see clearly that it is by mere confession that we can differentiate the Spirit of God from the spirit of the Antichrist. So it is by the confession of whether or not Jesus Christ is come in the flesh or not that we can know the spirit of the Antichrist. This simple confession implies many things and cuts across the whole of the Christian faith, so this confession is very important and any spirit that confesses contrary to this is not of God. Now knowing the spirit by their confession may seem easy, but I assure you it is not. First difficulty lies in the fact that you're flesh, so how do you hear the voice of a spirit? That is precisely what makes it to be very tricky.

Before we go on to see how to solve this tricky problem, let us look at what modern day translations of the Bible have done to

this highly important passage of scriptures. It's already tricky enough seeing the difficulty placed before us in trying to hear a spirit, but our modern day translations adds a whole new twist to make the problem more difficult to solve. I can tell you most confidently that many of these translations we're done for business purposes and not for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness as we are told in 2 Timothy 3:16. As a matter of fact some were written to diabolic purpose to deceive, confuse, and mislead. We'd just look at two translations and see the effects they have on the truth of the passage and how this has affected the church over the years. You may also agree that this has affected your mindset as it affected mine in time past.

First, the New Living Translation. I wonder why it's not called the Dead Translation. It reads, "This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here." (1 John 4:2-3). Here we are told that once a prophet acknowledges the truth about Jesus, he has the Spirit of God and is of God.

On the other hand, The Message Bible claims, "Here's how you test for the genuine Spirit of God. Everyone who confesses openly his faith in Jesus Christ — the Son of God, who came as an actual flesh-and-blood person — comes from God and belongs to God. And everyone who refuses to confess faith in Jesus has nothing in common with God. This is the spirit of antichrist that you heard was coming. Well, here it is, sooner than we thought!"

(1 John 4:2-3). So here, we are told that it is by mere confession of a person that we can know that the Antichrist is at work.

So if a man says, "Jesus came in the flesh..." then goes on to say, "being an homosexual is compatible with the Bible..." That person is of God. Is it not ridiculous? These are the false translations of scriptures that has made many Christians get confused when people who are highly placed in our churches start making some damnable utterances. When they think of how terrible these utterances are, they get confused when they recall all the verbal profession of faith of such men. It is behind these false translations that these hypocrites have gained acceptance in the church and led many people captive. My dear brethren, it is not by mere confession of a person that we test the spirit.

Well here is the truth of God as expressed in the King James Bible, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." (1 John 4:2 - 3). So we see here that it is not a mere confession of the mouth, writings, etc. of any man that the Bible is speaking about here but the voice of a spirit (that is the working of a spirit). There is a whole world of difference. And that is why I say, it is not easy, for hearing the words of a spirit, as it either acknowledges the truth about Christ or not, requires that we consider carefully its workings as it manifests through people, laws, doctrines, lifestyle, fashion, etc.

(Matthew 7:21 - 23) says, "Not every one that saith unto me,

Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21 - 23). So Jesus Christ clearly states here that mere confession does not make a Christian. Not even when you call him Lord, prophesy in his name, cast out devils in his name, and do many wonderful works in his name. Not even by these can you conclude that the spirit behind such people is of God. Jesus with his perfect vision sees through all these good things to still call such people workers of iniquity. How then do these translations allege that it is by mere confession of a person that we can know if they are of God or not.

We have seen that the Devil can do little or nothing by appearing to us as he is but by pretending to be who he's not. This he does easily by outward confessions and by this method he achieves huge success in his deceitful schemes. A good example of this can be seen in the story of David, in the tragedy of Absalom's rebellion. When Ahithophel took part with Absalom in his rebellion, David after praying sent his friend, Hushai, the only person I've seen the Bible refer to as David's friend (this is very important to note to get the point of this example to a fuller extent). But this friend of David, to be successful in defeating Absalom's council, he came to him not wearing a t-shirt on which was written "David For Life." Rather he came with a confession of loyalty. The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king." (2 Samuel 16:16). Why "God save the king?" Why didn't he say

something like, "you fool!" or "You rebel!" or anything that shall prove him to be who he is (David's friend)? Even Absalom was startled by this and asked, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend?" (2 Samuel 16:17). But with further verbal confessions of loyalty he won Absalom's trust and became his adviser with Ahitophel. It was now, standing as an adviser, that he could defeat the council of Absalom. As "the friend of David," he could not stand a chance, but as a "adviser," which he became by the confessions of his mouth, he thwarted the proceedings of Absalom's rebellion. All this was possible by the mere confession, "God save the king."

It is worthy of note though that Hushai was so wise that in all he said he told not a single lie. All he said was true and did not misrepresent him. In saying, "God save the king," he did not refer to Absalom but to the real king. You can read the rest of the account to see how he referred to David and not Absalom. When he spoke about serving, he didn't say he'd serve Absalom, but he'd serve in Absalom's presence. In other words he said, "I'd serve David your father in your presence." However, this tells us that mere confession does not make one to belong to God. Rather it can endear someone to you to make them close enough to harm you in a way they couldn't have done from afar.

It is the same way that the Devil will not come to you or the church with people wearing a t-shirt on which is written, "Lucifer Forever." Rather he'll send humble looking people, he'd have them dressed up the way you'd expect a dedicated Christian to. And when there's anything suspicious about them, they'd defend it from the very scriptures that you believe by misquoting it. He'd come with people who know our terms. They'd say hallelujah for everything that happens to them. They'd say "glory

to God," with the zest you'd expect from a true lover of God. And when they succeed in winning our trust, they can thwart the whole triumphant proceedings of the church.

It is the Devil's wish to populate hell not just with sinful and rebellious people but with good yet deceived people. Let us not allow ourselves to be one of them. Jesus said, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47 - 48). One may think that when he referred to the servants who knew not his Lord's will and committed the things worthy of stripes being beaten with few stripes, possibly meaning that servant shall be punished but not with eternal damnation, he meant also people who were deceived. But that is not true, he didn't mean deceived people by any means. It is one thing not to know, it is another thing to be deceived. If as a woman, you have read in your Bible that it is wrong to speak in the church, yet you go ahead to speak because someone convinced you to ignore the Bible, you're not ignorant of his will but you're outrightly disobedient being deceived. You shall be beaten with many stripes. You shall have your part with unbelievers. If as a man you know it is wrong to steal from people in the name of God as preachers do, yet you go ahead to do it being deceived because everybody else is doing it, you are outrightly disobedient. You shall be beaten with many stripes, you shall have your part with unbelievers. This is the Antichrist wish concerning you. Don't let him succeed in deceiving you.

A good example of disobedience as a result of being deceived can be found in 1 Kings 13. The young prophet was commanded thus, "Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest." (1 Kings 13:17). But to make him disobey, the old prophet describing himself said, like the Antichrist and his agents, "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him." (1 Kings 13:18). But did God consider the fact that he was deceived? No, for by the mouth of the same liar-prophet came God's verdict against him saying, "Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." (1 Kings 13:21 - 22). And so it happened to the prophet. Not that he didn't know the master's will, he knew. But being deceived he disobeyed. The same way it is today we have liar-prophets who would say, "I am a Christian like you and the angel of God revealed to me that you can disregard scriptures... Oh, do you want to hear it? Of course 'Jesus is Lord.'" And the same judgment shall be meted out to all those who sin because they were deceived. God shall not hold guiltless any who make him out to be a confusionist. A God who says one thing in his word and then contradict himself with the mouth and lifestyle of men who profess him.

So, how do we hear the voice of a spirit? You can't hear it by the aid of your ears but by trying it. It is by the outcome of your trying it that you can know if a spirit is of God or not. It is for this reason that the Bible tells us clearly, "believe not every

spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God..." (1 John 4:1). So how do you try a spirit. It is by what is stated in the verses following this, which we've looked at before and which we have seen that these modern translations of the Bible try to thwart.

As I've said before, to know when the spirit of the Antichrist is at work, you need to know the Christ first. The more you know the Christ the more you shall be able to tell when the spirit of the Antichrist is at work. When you know the working of the spirit of the Christ, you can tell that when anything opposes it, it must be by the spirit of the Anti Christ. The spirit of the Antichrist has two major objectives, which are, to negate the truth of Christ, and to dishonour him. Every working of a spirit to achieve this end can only be of the Antichrist. That is what apostle John spoke of in his epistle, and not that once a person, whether repentant or not, confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, he is of God.

Now it is very important that we test the spirit at work in every teaching, doctrine, system of belief, lifestyle, and every other sphere. Not just because it will do us a lot of good as individuals and as a church, but because it is also commanded by God. So failure to try every spirit is disobedience. But in seeking to obey this commandment, the other translations give us a very wrong sign to look for in knowing when these spirits are at work.

I was once invited to a church meeting of which the founder just started newly and was zealously seeking new members. Of course their doctrine had all the things that required it to be Christian. But they went on to say that just as everybody in Abuja claims to live in Abuja and tell their people in the village that this is where they live, but some are in Maitama (one of the

chief cities in Abuja) and some are in some other very underdeveloped areas of Abuja, same way it shall be in heaven. Some shall be in the Maitama of heaven while others will be in the underdeveloped parts of heaven. He said that Paul, for example, shall be in the Maitama of heaven, while the thief on the cross will be at the other parts where there'll be shit water flowing through the back of their houses. He went further, trying to have more effect on his hearers, to say that if Paul and the thief ended up in the same part of heaven, Paul would have every right to walk right to the throne of God and charge him with injustice.

The reason for pouring out these confused words of crappy reasoning and futile imaginations is to tell their listeners that though other churches are good, they'd only end you up in the shit water part of heaven, while if you join their new church, you'd end up in Maitama with Paul. Just listen to all that nonsense. But they gave glory to God. They believe that Jesus is come in the flesh and allege it too. But does that make them to be really of God? The answer is simple.

The spirit of the Antichrist can move a man to praise God verbally with the aim of reproaching him by the same means. I could tell you, "Jesus is Lord. He's the Son of God. He came in the flesh. I'm born again! O hallelujah!" Then tomorrow, the same me who made all these confessions, giving praise and honour to God, goes to steal in the marketplace and gets caught. This way, by means of praising and giving honour to him, God is being reproached. It is in the same vain Paul asks, "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" (Romans 2:23).

We see this in very many instances including many people that start their own churches to start preaching some damnable heresies. They'd come up with endless adverts that says, "come, we'd teach you the Bible, we'd make you to know God, and this and that," at the end of all their they'd say with an echo sound effect, "Jesus is Lord." And then if you're to judge by all those translations, you'd conclude that these people are working by the spirit of the God so far they just say, "Jesus is Lord," and for this reason we are bound to believe all they say. But this is not so. The spirit of the Antichrist can through verbal praising of God and acknowledgment of his truth mock him.

I, being once a member of an editorial team assigned with the responsibility of publishing a Christian magazine, I was opposed to the inclusion of one of the articles submitted to be featured in the magazine. The article was about the life of a so called gospel artiste by the name of Lacrea. The photo submitted for the article had this "gospel artiste" wearing all manner of jewellery, having earrings in his ears, and having tattoo on his hands and all over. I was strongly against the article as such a person did not fit what should be called a Christian, not to mention a Christian icon to be featured in a Christian magazine. Another member of the team said he completely approved of it and we had a brief argument about it. He was of the opinion that all these things don't matter. I was angry at such blunt denial of truth. In this state of mind, as I read my Bible, I came across 1 John 4:2-3. Having a wrong picture of what this passage was saying down the years, as I had used many of these modern day translations as a young Christian before using the King James Bible. I had been using the King James Bible many years before that experience, but the previous versions I had read seemed to blind my eyes from the truth of the passage. It bothered me

much that this passage seemed to defend what was clearly against other Biblical passages, that is if it were merely a confession of the mouth that determined whether or not a person was approved of God. It bothered me much as I read, for if we are to go with that, a prostitute can also come up and tell us "Jesus is Lord," then go on to tell us that prostitution is good, and we are to accept it. I got confused to a point of grief. But just as I've said, by this rapper singing the praise of God, he's accomplishing the will of the Antichrist in seeking to align the Christian faith with such stupidity of tattooing the body and wearing of jewellery even by men. Christ can scarcely be betrayed with anything less than a kiss. His first betrayal was by a kiss, so with much praise and sweet words hypocrites still betray him and his church.

Shall we go into history to talk about how with sweet Christian words the Antichrist operates best against Christ and his church? Such instances abound. Look at the world today. Without careful thought about doctrine and other things that make a church, who seems like the head of the church? The Pope! Why, because he pretends to belong to Christ. Roman Catholics are not Christians at all. The summary of their history is this;

Rome was a civilisation given to idolatry, then suddenly the Gospel of Christ started permeating every nook and cranny of the empire and people stopped worshipping their idols. This resulted in the persecutions and killings of Christians. But the more they persecuted and killed Christians the more they grew. As if their growth was not enough, even the emperor Constantine became a Christian himself. That was a deadly blow to their idolatry. They knew they could not withstand the power

of Christ crushing the heads of their deities to bits and pieces. So the only way they could survive was by leaning on the truth. They craftily fashioned their Roman idolatry to Christianity, trying to make their pagan worship to align with what is written in scriptures, and trying to make what is regarded as scriptures align with their pagan worship. It is just like a man being badly wounded, who leans upon a pillar to remain on his feet. That is how Roman idolatry, being dealt a fierce blow by Christ himself, leans upon the pillar of the truth of Christ to remain standing, and that is how Roman idolatry has been surviving till this moment.

For example, they know to say they worship the demon "queen of heaven," would not be possible, so they pretend to be worshipping Mary, the mother of Jesus. But this Mary they call also the "queen of heaven," which is a demon as clearly stated in Jeremiah 7:18 and Jeremiah 44:17-25. Every idolatry in paganism is enshrined in their form of Christianity. So by acknowledging all (or much) of what is written in scriptures they still, by crafty means, worship the Devil and make others worship the same. If it were just the outward show of people that 1 John 4:2-3 spoke about, the Pope surely confesses that Jesus came in the flesh and yet is a devil counterfeit. So whether he lifts himself above church and scriptures, and makes himself equal to or more than Christ, for the mere fact that he claims that Jesus came in the flesh, is he of God? Of course not.

It is also on this ground of mere confession that a lot of worldly musicians have been accepted as gospel musicians, just because they include the name of Jesus in their song lyrics. They sing about God but don't honour him with even their outward appearance. They will live lives that are contrary to scriptures

and have an outlook that is satanic with tattoos and all. The women, will scream about the salvation of Jesus, yet you can't see the fruit of salvation in them. Rather they'll put on revealing dresses that steers lust, and even worship God with uncovered hair. So they worship and honour Jesus with their lyrics, but the spirit of the Antichrist in them only uses these means to dishonour him. For seeing such people are popular and aired everywhere, they actually dishonour Christ and his word publicly to the whole world. Don't be carried away by how many there are that do this. Don't be carried away by how they've been generally accepted as representing Christ as some like to see them as "the ambassadors of Christ in the music industry." Let them even speak with the tongues of angels, if they oppose the word of God, they are not of God but of the Devil, unless they repent of their works.

The Bible clearly says in Romans 16:17-19 "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil." There are many injunctions here which the modern day Christians ignore at large, however key to note here is the fact that we are clearly told that people can, by "good words and fair speeches," do that which is evil. So be warned, the Antichrist also makes use of fair GOOD words. "Shout hallelujah," "Jesus is Lord," "God reigns forever," etc. Very good words, but even with these has much evil been done to the church of Christian and the reputation of our most holy faith.

By the same Anti-Christian spirit women today would mount pulpit and claim to be preaching to the honour of Jesus, but in the mere standing on the pulpit to speak, they have disobeyed the clear commandment of scriptures that a woman ought not to speak in the gathering of saints. They ought not to even ask questions. But they'd stand and teach and the world would see these appalling sight and wonder if the people of Christ have any brains at all. Little do they know that it is not the Spirit of Christ at work but the very Antichrist seeking to shame the gathering of saints (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). It is a shame for women to speak in our gatherings, but because the Antichrist at work in these people have the ultimate goal of dishonouring God, these people don't care. No wonder one shamelessly beat her chest while preaching and said, "as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, this breast is nothing."

The ways of how the Antichrist operates goes on and on, but key to how that affects our preparedness for the second coming of Christ is his deceptions. Yes he actively works all around us to ruin our societies, education, legal system, financial system, political system, etc. by seeking to destroy the family institution, by eroding our societal values, and by other means. Of course we must resist his operations in these spheres, but most importantly, if we must be ready for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be wary of his deceit.

We shouldn't allow ourselves to get carried away by the outward show of reverence to God. And we should not on this basis of outward show define who is on the Lord's side. We must test every spirit. And any spirit that opposes Christ must be rejected by us.

Summary

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

(John 8:32)

I don't want to continue listing out all the ways the Antichrist operates, lest we take forever to do that. Let us look rather at how to know when the spirit of the Antichrist is at work. It is not hard at all. We only need to do three things:

1. Know the voice of the Christ. The more we know the voice of the Christ, the more we can tell the voice of the Antichrist. This is of course by imbibing the word of God daily as we have discoursed in the chapter "TAKING HEED TO THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD." You can see here also why it is imperative to take thorough heed to the written word of God. Don't let any day pass by without your studying the Bible extensively. We don't have to care about the knowing of the voice of the Antichrist. We don't have to make studies about his lies. We don't have to read false religious books. We don't have to do all that, we just have to know the voice of the Christ and know it well. That should suffice. There's no other way to know the voice of the spirit of the Antichrist than by knowing the voice of Christ.

John 10:4-5 says, "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." You see the importance

of knowing the voice of the Christ. You see also that to flee from strangers, the knowledge of the voice of the stranger is not needed. Knowing the voice of Christ is more than enough.

2. Put on the whole armour of God. Ephesians 6:13-18 lists out the components of the armour of God. They include,

I. Truth

II. Righteousness

III. Preparation of the gospel of peace

IV. Faith

You can see once again the importance of the word of God here, for it is in the written word we find word of truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace and the word that inspires faith. If we shall ensure we have on these armour of God always, there's no way the Antichrist can deceive us.

3. Pray. We cannot over emphasise the role of prayer. I shall speak on prayer in the section that focuses on prayer

Conclusion

"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

(1 John 4:6)

In conclusion dearest brethren, These are the things we've spoken about in this chapter:

-Failure to test every spirit is disobedience to Biblical instructions.

-The Antichrist is more of a spirit than he is a person.

-Let us not be deceived by modern day translations, but stick to the King James Bible.

-In trying to draw out parameters by which we could test the spirit, we need to look beyond mere confession and other outward show.

-We shouldn't allow ourselves to be carried away by the general acceptance of people who profess Christ yet dishonour him through disobedience.

-To be able to know the voice of the Antichrist and to be able to withstand him, we must know the voice of the Christ, we must put on the armour of God, and we must pray.

Do not be deceived but watch. May God help us and deliver our souls from the wiles of the evil one in Jesus' name. Amen.

***Prayer:** Dear Father, I see that the deceptions of the evil one is great. Greater than what we could save ourselves from. I therefore ask that you would deliver us from him and his wiles. Help us to watch and not be caught in his snares. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

WATCHING AGAINST THE FEAR OF THE CONTEMPT OF MEN

"And others had trial of cruel mockings..."

(Hebrews 11:36)

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

(Luke 9:26)

Now I wish to talk about the fear of contempt. This also applies to every form of persecutions a Christian can face, but I write with special emphasis on contempt as it is about the most subtle and dangerous of all persecutions that is capable of causing us to wreck our faith. I have always known that the Bible warns us about the fear of contempt but as I wrote on the subject and read through scriptures I realised that a larger chunk of the New Testament talks about bearing shame and thus warns of the fear of it. This made me see to a new degree the importance of being weary about this fear.

The fear of the contempt of men is one thing that is very capable to deter people from doing God's will. People shy away from doing God's will because they're afraid of the contempt of men.

And it is usually the nature of people of our fallen world to throw contempt at the righteous. Go through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, you'd see the same trend repeating itself always. The same story of Mocking the righteous. Not only do they show contempt to the righteous but to righteousness itself. It happens all the time. So if you're afraid of contempt, just be sure that you will over time drift away from the path of righteousness. That's a certainty.

Fear of shame is a natural part of human life. It is not diabolical. Take in our homes for example, there're duties we consider demeaning and so we shy away from it. Maybe your mum tells you to go grind something at the market place. Maybe you're a boy, you've done it before and you discover you're the only guy that comes around to grind things. The task is essential, you're probably the best person to do it, and it ought to be done, but because of shame we sometimes refuse to do it except if you're forced. And for this reason of this fear obeying our parents becomes a problem. So it is natural for the fear of contempt or shame to deter us even from essential things. But though such fear is a natural part of us all, we should never let it deter us from being prepared for the second coming of Christ.

In my book, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE," I noted that Jesus Christ said, "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." (Matthew 11:28-30). I am not sure how it has been down the age of Christian existence, but being a part of today's church I can observe it more closely in our midst than I can observe it in the churches of the past. I see that many of us would just like to

stop in verse 28 in which we were invited saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We often don't want to go further from here. We just want to take our troubles and headaches to him. Those who are seek would wish to take their sickness to him for divine healing. Those who are poor would like to take their poverty to him for divine provision. Those who are seeking promotion in their working places would go to him for divine promotion. Everything divine and unmerited favour. All we want is just benefits but Christ is not for such a deal, for in verse 29 he goes on to say, "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." Jesus does have a yoke that he wishes to put on your shoulders for you to bear. Yes he has rest to offer us but this rest comes to us when we take his yoke upon us. Bearing the contempt of the world is just one of the burden he wants you to bear.

It is natural that if you're in the midst of thieves to be despised of them if you don't take part in their theft. Why shouldn't they? Before they go stealing they first saw it as wise. To them it was gain. Imagine having what you never worked for. Imagine enjoying the wealth you couldn't imagine you could possess in a lifetime. Is that not just like the unmerited favour some people are desperately looking for? Many things have gone through their heads before they could come up with this working formula to steal. So when you choose not to steal, when you choose not to cheat in the exam hall, when you choose not to join in their evil, it makes you look foolish and unwise. That is why it is written in 1 Peter 4:3-4, "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run

not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:" Righteousness in an evil world is strange. For this reason, in well doing, shame and contempt must come, and this is just one of the yoke of Christ we must bear. He 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." It is in the bearing of this yoke that we shall find rest unto our souls and not apart from this yoke. We cannot find rest unto our souls apart from the shame and contempt of the world. Let us not be deceived.

Verse 30 is very important. It says, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The yoke of Christ is easy and his burden is light. Do you know what is the heavy yoke? The heavy yoke that you cannot bear is eternal damnation. Eternity in hell. That is the heavy yoke you cannot bear. But all these little burdens here and there including the contempt of men are easy and light. And the funny thing about the burden of Christ is that you'll never know how light it is until you pick it up. It is when it is on your shoulders that you begin to wonder, "is this the 'heavy' yoke I've been scared of carrying? Is this what I've been thinking would kill me?" It is just like a very big sack placed somewhere in the room, it is filled but you don't know with what. And a man tells you take that sack downstairs and I'll give you rest in return. You begin to wonder if this man wants you to die under the weight of that big sack and is merely using the promise of rest as a bait. But needing rest so much you decide to summon the courage and strength to take it down stairs. But on trying to pick it up, you find it is not filled with rocks but wool, and you could lift it up and take it downstairs easily with one hand. That is how the yoke of Christ is. It may appear huge, but don't judge it a great thing until you have carried it because his yoke is easy and his burden is light. This is why, I assume, he tells us

immediately that the yoke he wants us to carry is easy and light because he knows that once we hear about the "yoke," we could as well take to our heels.

Knowing the lightness of the burden of Christ and knowing that you cannot know that his burden is light until you find it so, Daniel S. Warner wrote in his hymn the following words as a chorus;

*"His yoke is easy, His burden is light,
I've found it so, I've found it so;
His service is my sweetest delight,
His blessings ever flow."*

It is when we begin to carry the burden of his shame that we shall begin to see that it is even those things that we thought were glorious that are even shameful. It is in that time we shall begin to be truly free and begin to see things as he sees. It is by this that we can be saved from the blindness of heart. The things they glory in would start looking like toys to you. Isaac Watts also wrote;

*"If Thou these blessings give,
And wilt my portion be;
Cheerful the world's poor toys I leave,
To them who know not Thee."*

This is a man that has borne the shame of Christ enough to know that these things the world glory in are but poor toys. All the glory, fame, wealth, power, comfort, enjoyment, entertainment, etc. are all poor toys. Imagine adults playing, not just with toys, but poor toys. That is the level of contempt the

man had for what the world held as glorious. This is common with all saints of old. Paul too says, "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..." (Philippians 3:8). All things includes all the things that the world glory in, whatever it may be. He counted ALL THINGS as dung. So to Paul, it was dung they held so tightly to themselves in a warm embrace. Why and how did he come to such an excellent knowledge of Christ? He says, "... Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things..." When you haven't let go of these things they'd look so important to you. It is when you let them go that you will know that true joy comes through bearing the shame of Christ. It is only after you have begin to bear the burden that you shall know that it is light and easy.

The things that the world hold so dear cannot bring joy or satisfaction in any way. I saw a post on Facebook, probably the words of an actor, which goes, "I wish everybody in the world would have all the money, all the wealth, all the properties, and everything they so want, so that they can know that these things don't bring happiness in any way." We may go after these things thinking that in them we find happiness, but truly, happiness comes from God alone.

Though Christianity is a glorious calling, it is not a glamorous one. It is glorious in the power that works in us at the present and glorious in the eternal plan God is working towards, but it is in no way a glamorous one. Also in my book, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE," I explained to some extent why God allows us to go through certain things and why of necessity we must go through these things if we're to have a glorious ending.

Sometimes we take the doctrine of grace out of place to mean we shall make it to heaven without merit. Yes grace means salvation is a gift. That is a gift means that you cannot boast, beating your chest and saying, "I made it to heaven." But that you made it to heaven can only be because you're worthy. That is why it is written, "...and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." (Revelation 3:4). God will by no means make his glorious heaven a joint of unworthy and inglorious people. The Bible tells us over and over again in the book of Revelations. "He that overcometh..." shall wear a crown of life, etc. To make it to heaven, there is an overcoming we must overcome. One of the major things we must overcome is the fear of contempt. Our worthiness, and consequent glorification, can only be by virtue of what we endure, including the contempt of men.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Why do you think that Jesus died for you and I? Do you think it was a glorious thing for Jesus to die? I don't know which was worse or more painful for Jesus, was it the beatings and the nailing, or was it the shame. While we cannot tell, the shame he bore was obviously terrible. Someone said, it would have been understandable if Jesus had entered a room with his disciples, ask them to lock the door and in their presence alone lie down and die for you and I. I think that would have been much better. But why must he die in the public and in such a shameful way? Before his very antagonists knowing the mockery that would result from it? I mean Jesus Christ was not forced to die, he gave himself to die. He knew everything that was associated with such a death, yet he still chose to die that

way.

But why did he chose to die despite these? He did it to lay an example for us. When Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus..." it meant that we should follow him and have him as our example. How did he overcome all these to die such a shameful death? It says he despised the shame. And that is what you and I as Christians have to learn from our loving master. We have to be able to despise the shame that the world is able to throw at us. We have to ensure we are not perturbed by their contempt. We have to see how insignificant the contempt of men is.

The shame he bore was the will of the Father. It was not just to die but to bear the shame for us. But Jesus wouldn't have died on the cross had he allowed the contempt of men to deter him. We won't go far in our Christian journey if we allow the contempt of men move us.

Matthew 27:41-44 says, "Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." (Matthew 27:41 - 44). This is just a little pinch of the sufferings of Christ. If you read the whole from the arrest down to his death you'd see the immensity of all the mockery that Jesus Christ, who is himself God, went through. Where mere men would slap the maker of earth saying, "prophesy, who slapped you." Imagine such mockery on the High Eternal One. Imagine such an unspeakable insult on his person. Jesus knowing all these things still chose to go through them

because he despised the shame. He saw it as something insignificant and having this mind, he was able to die for you and I fulfilling God's will to the uttermost. If Jesus Christ had allowed the fear of contempt to creep into his heart, he'd not have fulfilled God's will to the uttermost. He'd have compromised somewhere, probably, as stated above, he may just call his disciples into a secret room and die in their presence alone. But that wouldn't be doing the will of God, and that would be complete disobedience.

Today however, people allow a lot of fear of what people would say to deter them from keeping God's command. We wonder, "if I do this right thing, won't people laugh at me?" Sometimes you may be where people are and feel you should preach the Gospel to them, but the fear of what they'll say would keep you from preaching. You're afraid that they'll mock you. You know it is good to preach, but you failed to do it because of the fear of what people would say. Sometimes it maybe when you see people living in ways that are not Biblical and you don't want to live the way they live, you don't want to dress the way they dress, you don't want to steal, you don't want to lie, you don't want to disobey your parents, etc. You don't want to do all these things, and because you know that refusing to live this way would attract the contempt of those who do them, and for this reason doing that which is right begin to seem hard to do. But we ought not allow contempt to deter us from doing what God wants us to do.

We read in Acts 5:40, "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." (Acts 5:40). The apostles were beaten in public here. This was so

shameful especially considering that these are full grown men, probably with wives and children. If I were beaten that way I probably would not be able to come out in public for six months. But did the fear that this could repeat itself deter them from doing God's will? Did they say, this is too shameful for us to bear? In the next two verses it goes, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:41 - 42). Rather than feeling ashamed, they rejoiced (despising the shame), and they even preached the word, doing God's will just as before. If we must act gloriously as they did, we must disregard and despise the shame of the world. We must know that it cannot remove anything from us.

In today's church, the fear of contempt is so pronounced. The fear of contempt rather than the fear of God is what determines our actions today. We're rather moved by fear of contempt. We're moved by the fear of what others would say and not what God would say. That is why we find ourselves in a whole lot of mess today. This is really sad. It is suppose to be the fear of God, both the reverential fear and the fear of his terror, that should shape our lives and guide the course of our actions. We ought to always have in us that holy fear that shall always drive us to do God's own will. And where that holy fear is, no other fear can stand. Whether it be fear of contempt, fear of men, or of devils. They just can't stand.

There're many people in the church who don't approve of the prevalent lifestyle of the society and which has also crept into the church, but they join them in the way they live because they're afraid of the shame of being different. So they for fear

they do it the first time and overtime become accustomed to it. Someone once posted on Facebook the difference between female gospel singers of the past and modern day female gospel singers and I tell you, if at all you love God, your heart would bleed, because the difference is just so much. We've left the way of godliness and are now in the way of wickedness. Many people who love God chose this way of life over time, not because they approve of it, but for fear of contempt and mockery they accepted it. They'd say to themselves, "if I don't put on skimpy clothes they'd call me the mother of Jesus... If I don't dress half naked they'd see me as someone that is blinded by superstitions..." And for the fear of these mockery they start living in a way contrary to the will of God.

Many preachers are even afraid of the contempt that comes with preaching godliness. Some especially those living a sinful life they're not willing to repent of thrust criticism at preachers who oppose their way of life. Sometimes they'd give you many names such as, "old timer," "prophet of doom," and so on. At other times it may not come by verbal criticism but refusal to show approval especially while the preaching is going on. And because of this strange fear, preachers would avoid such messages and preach messages that'll make them appear loved and approved of their congregation. Messages that would get people screaming "amen," "hallelujah," and all that, instead of sermons that'll stir sober reflection, contrition, and repentance. They'd prefer to preach rosy messages of prosperity, rosy messages of success, rosy doctrine of a grace that covers even sin not repented of, all those rosy messages that don't stir repentance and revival. And the fear of this criticism makes them to fail to do God's word and will.

The Gospel of Christ says, "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). But for the fear of being called religious bigots some Christians shy away from affirming that Jesus is the only way by which we must be saved. They'd rather say he is one of the ways or avoid saying it altogether. They try not to tell people that their religion can't save them and that only in Christ can they find salvation. The fear of contempt therefore makes them preachers of heresy.

If we must be prepared for the second coming of the Lord Jesus, we must not allow the fear of contempt have any part in our hearts. We must be able to be bold in everything we do and do it regardless of the opinions or contempt of men. We must allow the word of God to guide us in all that we do no matter what anybody else says or thinks. That is exactly the lesson we can learn from Jesus Christ. He knew they were going to mock him, he knew they were going to insult him, he knew they were going to kill him, he knew all the shame that will come, yet he despised all these things to do the Father's will. He did this because he knew the joy that was set before him and for its sake endured the cross despising the shame. We too know the great joy that shall be revealed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. So why shouldn't we prepare for that joy? Why should we allow little things here and there to deter us from being ready for his second coming?

Hebrews 12:2, which we've read before, says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." So what does this tell us? After all these things comes glory. After all these

shame, after all these reproach, after everything we have endured for the Master's sake comes glory in their place. And then tell me, what shall be the end of those who reproached you? If we pay attention to contempt, we shall do nothing beneficial for our souls and eternal destinies. We shall fail. We shall not be ready when the Lord Jesus shall come.

As I spoke on this topic in the Bible study from which this book was drawn, a brother asked the students, "how many of you have ever felt someone being ashamed of you in public? Not necessarily by his words, but just the way he treats you, you could tell this person is ashamed of you. How would that feel? Especially if this person is someone you have done so much for?" He gave an example that [paraphrased] "imagine if two people were walking by the road and speeding car was about to hit one of them, and the other quickly pushes her out of the way and he broke his foot and fell into the mud. Whereas she fell on the grass quite unstained and unhurt. So when this person came passing by, she started pretending not to know the person who saved her life because of the mud on him and because he was limping. He put his very life on the line to save her, now because of a common mud stain she becomes ashamed of him. He must feel very bad seeing how she treats him especially considering that he got this way in the bid to save her life. That is how it is with Christ also, but what he did for us is infinitely more than that. When we become ashamed of him, he must feel very bad for not merely risking his life, but putting it down completely and willingly to save ours.

As a way of summarising, let me stress the negative impact of this fear of contempt to our being prepared for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and consequently the day of judgment,

let us hear something Jesus has to say on the matter, "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26). This tells us that if we are ashamed of him for any reason, we shall be denied entry into his kingdom. If we shall be ashamed of him because we want the world to be our friends and don't want them to leave us, because we want their praise, or for any other reason at all, he says that when he comes he too shall be ashamed of us when he shall return.

Do you want to be ready when Christ shall come? Learn to despise the shame of men and walk proudly, doing God's will, in the face of their contempt. Let us learn not to be ashamed of Jesus Christ. Let us learn to be proud of him. Everywhere you go, let people know you're a Christian. Let everything you do, say, and wear, let it reflect Christ and his most holy faith. Let these things shout to the world, "I AM A CHRISTIAN. I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH HIM, HAVE BEEN RISEN WITH HIM UNTO A NEW LIFE, AND I HAVE THE BLESSED HOPE OF LIVING WITH HIM ETERNALLY." Let our profession be like that of Paul, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth..." (Romans 1:16).

If your heart is weak in this regard, hear the word of the Lord, "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings." (Isaiah 51:7). May God help us to be strong in character and not weak so as to be shaken by contempt and reproach in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I know that the fear of shame and contempt is a natural part of human life but I also see that it is very capable of hindering me from being prepared for your second coming. Help us to be strong and learn to despise the shame of men and walk victoriously in the face of them to meet a glorious day when you return. This I ask in Jesus' dear name. Amen.*

WATCHING AGAINST THE LOVE OF THE PRAISE OF MEN

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!"
(Luke 6:26)

Now I shall talk about watching out for something "positive" coming to us. I speak of praise of men. If contempt is negative then we can see praise as positive. As positive as it is we must watch against it too. I could even say more than we watch against contempt. The fear of contempt as well as the love of praise work together to bring people down.

The Right Use of Praise

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates."
(Proverbs 31:30 - 31)

Praise is good and is a powerful incentive to encourage people in well doing. Failure to give praise to whom it is due amounts to

robbery. Proverbs 31:30 says, "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." Praise is to be given, not just to women, but to all those whose way of life really merits it according to God's own standard. Romans 13:3 also agrees to the fact that praise naturally follows well doing for it says, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same."

Praise could spur people into better works therefore the wise use it as a way of encouraging well doing. There was this job I did regularly for someone but used to get little or no praise for it, rather all I got was complaint after complaint. But one day, a young man came by and said to me [paraphrased], "wow, you're doing a very good job." That statement put a smile on my face and I put more effort into doing it. Not that I consciously decided to put more effort into doing that job but I just found my self happily putting more effort. Afterwards I had to ask myself, "is it just because of this little statement that I'm putting all this effort to this job?" So that is how praise is. It has the ability to spur people to better actions sometimes even more than money can.

So in what we shall be talking about in this chapter, I'm not saying that praise is entirely bad. Let's be clear on that. It has its right uses, but we must be very careful about it. As good as praise is, Jesus Christ warned us without mincing words, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26). If the praise of men were not harmful to us Jesus wouldn't have condemned it in such terms. It is capable of shipwrecking the faith of even the strongest of people. It is subtle but powerful. Let's be warned.

The Adverse Effect Of The Love Of Praise

*"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not
 the honour that cometh from God only?"*

(John 5:44)

You see, the Christian calling is different from every other aspect of life. The approach used in spurring people into action in anything that pertains to this world (whether good or bad) can't work when applied to our Christian walk with God. For example, using money incentives can achieve much in spurring people to do something. Financial reward is the fuel of productivity but when you introduce it into Christian service, it becomes a poison that kills those who benefit from it. You can succeed in the world by pursuing money, but should you pursue money in your service to God, you'd surely abandon his work and wreck your faith. There are many other things that are beneficial in the things that pertains to this world but are harmful and destructive when the same approach is used for spiritual things, and one of them is praise. For this reason we must watch against the love of praise.

Jesus Christ says, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). Here he makes us to understand that people who seek praise from men can't believe in God or at least that the love of praise of men works against belief in God. If our walk with God must be done in total belief (for without faith it is

impossible to please God), then we can be sure that the praise of men and the love of it is harmful to our walk with God and consequently being prepared for the second coming of the Lord.

Romans 10:8-10 says, "But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." We ought to take a very key note of that word, "confession." Here Paul lists things that lead to salvation. He says, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," but that is not enough. He continues, "and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

This is why I know that there's nothing like secret Christianity. A Christianity of which only you know that you're a Christian and no one else knows. If there's a Christianity like that, it lacks the efficacy of salvation and what is Christianity without salvation? If people don't know that you are a Christian, it is because you've not confessed that you are. And if you haven't confessed it, then your salvation is questionable. For it is by your confession that you are a Christian, not by verbal confession only but also by the virtue of believing and practicing all the truth of the faith; Our words and works must confess that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, he came in flesh, was crucified for our sins, arose from the grave in victory over death, and is enthroned at the right hand of the Father, etc. When we confess this openly acknowledging that this is true is what makes us saved. Because "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Of course we know that, as James wrote in his epistle, there's the need of

works for faith and confession of faith to be effective, but I shall not deal with that here as my focus is on the importance of confession to salvation.

Now, the Bible also says of the chief rulers of Jesus' days, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:42 - 43). We can see here that the chief rulers, though they believed on him refused to confess him. Why? "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." In such a state do you think they could have been saved just because they believed on him? Judging with a right judgment according to Romans 10:8-10, we know that in that state they were not in any way saved.

This is what the love of the praise of men can do. It intercepted and truncated the salvation process so that they could not confess him. These people stood in a state of condemnation just because they didn't want to lose the praise of men. Same way today, many are working in the way of perdition, though they believe with their heart, just because of the love they have for the praise of men. The love of praise can make us to be all unprepared to meet Jesus when he does come.

These people couldn't go the whole way with Jesus at least at the time the writer of the gospel wrote about, just because they loved the praise of men. The praise of men blinds our eyes. If we allow it to get to us, we may never go the whole way with God. But I tell you, what Jesus says is, "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10:22). Only those who go the whole way with God shall be saved, not those who allow the vain praise of men

truncate their heavenward journey.

Back to the issue of homosexuality, a friend of mine told me of a preacher who said that there was nothing in the Bible that condemns homosexuality, and for that alone he was invited to some of the best news broadcasting channels in the world. This they did just because they wanted to hear him repeat the same thing. And when they invite such people, they don't just go straight to the questions, they'd first tell the world, for example, how he's the pastor of the fastest growing church in America with an incredible amount of members, with a massive structure, great philanthropic projects, etc. And introduce them in a magnificent way to the whole world. Wow! All they need from you is just to repeat that lie. First the lie was told for acceptance, then they'd continue in their heresy repeating the same thing before the whole world. Why? The love of the praise of men. This is an example to the extreme, but I can assure you that there're far subtler and lesser ways that people sell their faith for the sake of praise. All these, whether extreme or subtle, all result in damnation.

The Adverse Effect Of Praise Itself

"As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise."

(Proverbs 27:21)

This is to tell us the praise of men is what fire is to gold or silver. It tries a man. Now how many of us like trials and temptations?

If you don't like it, then avoid praise too. Do you know what gold and silver go through in the refining process? It goes through intense heat. It is such that Solomon in his wisdom said praise puts a man through.

If a man can retain his senses in the midst of praise, he is truly of a strong character. Does this mean we should then expose ourselves to unnecessary trial to prove we are of strong character? No. We shouldn't try to gain the praise of people as this would greatly increase the fervency of the heat of the furnace that tries our character under which we may not stand. For this reason, it is wisdom to avoid the praise of men as much as possible. In everything you do, never do it for praise. If what you are doing could bring you praise, if it is good don't stop doing it but do it in a way to keep praise away. You shall be doing yourself a whole lot of good.

A Facebook friend of mine who is very vibrant in his posts and denunciation of the abuses in the church posted something one day. A lady wanted to introduce something heretic as a comment on his post. She didn't just come up and say it, rather, she first of all said nice things about his post, she said she read it with great enjoyment, she praised his choice of words and all that. After these she then presented her heretic point. Because of that praise my friend started showing some level of acceptance for her heresy. On a normal day, he wouldn't have easily looked favourably to an heresy, but the crafty lady first of all softened him with praises before trying to strike through him with her heresy. So faith works deceitfully. But thanks be to God it didn't take time for him to brush off the praise.

There was a great king of the Israelites who served God and did

his will for some part of his life but in the latter part of his life he did wickedly. That king was Joash. He was still a little child when Athalia sought to kill all the seed royal after the death of Ahaziah, her son. She succeeded in killing all the other seed royal but the wife of the priest Jehoiadas stole him away alive. This priest protected him, planned and executed successfully the operation that brought him to his throne, and he taught him all the ways of the Lord establishing the kingdom under him. But when this priest grew old and died, Joash began to do very wickedly, left the Lord his God, he served idols, and killed the son of this priest who brought him to power. How did it all happen? It all started at praise, for it is written, "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them." (2 Chronicles 24:17). It was that obeisance and his acceptance of it that destroyed him. He was one of the few kings in Judah whose servants conspired against him and murdered him. He had a sorry end for God executed judgment on him.

So the love of praise has a destructive effect that exceeds that of fear of contempt. The Bible says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12). When you think you're standing, one of the things that can throw you to the ground and make you lay prostrate in defeat is the praise of men.

The Vanity Of The Praise Of Men

"They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips

and with a double heart do they speak."
(Psalm 12:2)

"A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."
(Proverbs 29:5)

Now we're going to look at why you shouldn't take the praise of men as anything. No matter how much men praise you or no matter how wonderful they tell you that you are, don't let that get to you because it is all vain and without value. Men are in the habit of praising insincerely for gain and when it is done sincerely, it is often out of poor judgment. For these reasons, the praise of men shouldn't define your worth. It would be foolish to think that you're important just because everyone is praising you. It would also be foolish to become downcast because no one is praising you.

Matthew 22:16 - 18 reads, "And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" You see this crude rejection? "Ye hypocrites..." Now that is tough. These people came with sweet words of praise that men of today would die for and in fact sell their faith for. A praise sweeter than what CNN could give, but did he accept it? No.

Now, what I want to point out specifically here are these words, "But Jesus perceived their wickedness..." Behind that sweet

praise was wickedness. Behind that rosy praise was a trap. So, you can see that the praises you get does not necessarily mean you worth anything. Rather, many times, there're wickedness and snares behind the praises men give. So when they praise you it is because of something else they want to achieve. But this did not work on Jesus for he was a person of strong character, or else he would have said something in line with their desire that they may trap him with.

Sometimes people deliberately use their praises as a trap, like the hypocrites the Pharisees sent to Jesus, and at other times they are not aware themselves. In such case they mean well but it ends up a trap like when the women of Israel sang the praise of David (1 Samuel 18:6-8). You must know that whether or not people mean well or ill in their praises, it does not add value to you. The praise the women of Israel sang about David was not what made him a king. He could have been killed like a dog due to their praises. He only became a king because God chose him and anointed him to be king. So it is what God says that matters not what people say. The praise of men adds no value to you. When they say all manner of good and sweet things to you, just disregard it, discard it, and throw it away. Don't you go thinking saying, "wow, so I'm this amazing..." There praise does not in any way mean you're amazing neither does it make you amazing. Just discard it.

Sometimes, even when you don't wish to accept the praise of men you won't know how to handle it without sounding rude. But in Jesus we see a seemingly crude rejection of praise of men as we've seen above. In many occasions especially where we perceive a wicked intent (deliberately so or unknowingly so), this is a good example to follow. Praise is like a gun that kills. When

someone picks a gun and finding a particle on your face intends to use the nozzle of the gun to take off the particle, you know that he doesn't know that a gun could kill and so could press the trigger any time, how would you respond? You'd chide him for the favour right? Same way we ought to fully reject praise the way Jesus did. Don't be afraid of being rude in doing that. We shall talk further on the right response to the praises of men.

So, in your walk with God, you must always encourage yourself in persevering in well doing whether or not you're praised. And even when people do praise you, you should not allow that to become your motivating factor. If someone gets praise because of his well doing and he allows that praise to get to him, whenever that praise stops the well doing also would stop and God shall not be pleased with such a fellow. We must make sure that our well doing is not tied to the expectation of praise of any kind or from any source.

Acts 12:20-23 says, "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." Just hear the magnitude of that praise. They actually said "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Do you think they praised him with all that praise because he was actually a god or because he spoke with the voice of a god? But why would they rain such praise on a mortal? The answer is in the verse where it

says, "because their country was nourished by the king's country." So they wanted something from him that is why they praised him with such undue praises. But the foolish man accepted the praise thinking he really spoke with the voice of a god and the angel of God stroke him dead. So it was the acceptance of the undue praise of men that made the world's first "worm-eaten god." Such is the deception behind the praise of men...

There's a true life story of a man (Archbishop Thomas Wolsey) I once heard who served his king with all his might. He won much praise from everyone especially the king. In the course of his service to his king he got to the post of Lord Chancellor. As a matter of fact, people depicted him as a second king. But a time came when he became old and worn and could no longer render service to his king as before. Guess what happened? The king banished him and after a while charged him with treason. The king had meant to execute him, but he died of a natural cause on his way to be executed. About the last moments of the life of this poor man, he wrote a lamentation that ends with these words, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies."

That is what happens when you allow the praise of men and the expectation of it to become the pilot of your life. This man had an ecclesiastical position of Archbishop of York which he abandoned during his years of service to the king, all because of praise and expectation of it. But see his end. The sad thing about such realisation is that anything that has to do with time cannot be recovered. In such a state one can only regret without any ability to make amends. This was the way he died because the praise he enjoyed blindfolded him. He lost touch with reality and at his

dying day he died heavy with regrets. He thought they praised him for his own sake, little did he know he was praised of the king because of what he enjoyed from him. All that praise was just to say "do more," and not because he was anything dear to him.

As I said, the praise of men are also usually ill informed. When someone comes by and praises you, it is probably because he doesn't know you well enough. You know there's something about the human life that should really deter people from praising others foolishly. Jesus Christ says, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Luke 6:41). We all know what a beam is compared to the eye. Jesus Christ was merely using a figure of speech here not that he meant that it were possible to have a beam in your eyes. But rather when you have even a speck on your lashes, you know it appears very big compared to other things around. This is what I believe he refers to as a beam. What does this mean? It means you are more conscious of your own faults than others. It is you who know yourself. It is you who know your shortcomings. My faults are more visible, obvious, and bigger to me than it is to other people. How shall I ignore these faults that are open and visible before me to attend to the faults of others. That is what I believe he meant.

Now you've probably never heard that I fought before, broke someone's head, or stole before. You've never seen in a newspaper somewhere, "BREAKING: Ayo Has Done It Again: He Beats His Pastor And Throws Him Off The Pulpit (Read more on Page 4)." You've never heard that of me before, but now you'd tell me that I'm a good person because you've never seen me in this misconducts. While you will look at me as a good person. I know

my own thoughts. I know that while I've never broken anybody's head, the thought may have come to my mind (maybe when I'm angry). But maybe I only restrained myself because I know that if I break a person's head he'd break mine in return. But no one can know this except me. You only see that I didn't do it, you can never know that were it not for fear I'd probably have gone on a head breaking spree rampage at the slightest provocation. This is the same with every other vice. We only see actions but we never see the true reasons behind them.

Only you and God are the ones that know the secrets of your heart. So when people who are so ignorant of these secrets of your heart come to start praising you as good, then you ought to know that they do so out of ignorance. The praise of men can never tell you who you really are. So don't accept it. Rather accept only the praise that comes from God.

There are also some people that just delight in praising people for strange reasons. Reasons beyond my understanding. They gain some strange satisfaction by heaping unnecessary praises on people. I was once in the office of my elder brother to assist him in doing one or two things. These two guys came around while my brother wasn't around and realising I was his brother and that I was quite good at what my elder brother does, one of them told the other, "Engineer [for that is what they call my elder brother] is such an amazing guy." Then he gave the guy this look as if he admired my brother so much and went on, "do you know he's the one that trained all his brothers..." I was amazed at him but was able to suppress my shock. How does he know if or not me and my siblings were trained by my elder brother in question? Just because my brother is good at his work and they saw that I'm good too, they jumped to such a silly and

untrue conclusion about my elder brother. The same way when people praise you, sometimes it is because they jumped to a silly and untrue conclusion about you. You'd be silly too to accept it.

The Right Response To The Praise Of Men

"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:26)

We've seen briefly the right response to the praise of men when we saw how Jesus responded to the hypocrites sent to him from the Pharisees, but we shall look further at this here. The first epistle to the Corinthian church serves as a perfect example for us about the right response to praise. In the Corinthian church, it happened that there was division in their midst as a result of people choosing apostles to be identified with. It is not that these apostles preached differing doctrines as church founders of today, but despite the unity of doctrine, the Corinthian church still found a way of trying to lift one apostle over the other. By this action of declaring allegiance to the apostles, they also lifted the apostles beyond what they were. They ought to belong to Christ alone, but now they have exalted the apostles and wish to be identified by their favourite apostle. This was a way of praising the apostles.

The apostles all got their share of praise in this division including Paul who wrote the epistle. For the fact that Paul heard that people said, "I belong to Paul," he ought to have received the praise and be puffed up at this like the church

founders of today. When people say they belong to the church of this man or to that man, they love it. They love it so much they quickly go and prepare stickers for your cars, for the doors of your house, for your Bibles, etc. Then they go mass produce jotters with their logo and name for you take about. All because they want your voice to be louder in saying "I belong to you!" Instead of them to ask, "is Christ divided?" and ask them also, "were we crucified for you?" or "were you baptised in my name?" Rather than do this they'd encourage people in this practice. For this reason the church is being more divided because men are craving for the praise that doesn't belong to them. This is what the praise of men is costing us in the church of today. But this wasn't the way of Paul. He did not receive the praise to himself, rather the first four chapters were written to chide the Corinthians for the praise they had begin to heap on the apostles before he moved to the issue of fornication in chapter five.

When you read these first four chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, you'd see that Paul seemed to have a heated dispute against the Corinthian church. When you see the words he used in these passages, it tells you a lot about the feeling he had boiling in him. Words such as, "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." (1 Corinthians 4:10). You'd think that what could have caused such a dispute would be because they borrowed a large sum of money from him and have refused to pay back. But when you come closer to hear what is really causing all the fuss, you'd realise he's only angry because they praised him. Isn't that shocking? Picture somebody setting a house in commotion because he was told that he's good looking, or that he's so intelligent, etc. It is funny to hear such. However, Paul being a man of spiritual maturity and character would not

take the issue of division and undue praise as a light matter.

The text describing this factionalism that was beginning to rise amongst the Corinthian brethren goes thus, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name." (1 Corinthians 1:10 - 15). This kind of divisive action has in it an element of pride in it. A form of pride that makes you want to be different from others. Even those who claimed to belong to Christ also had fault, for in that claim they still had this pride of being separate from others. If they had claimed that "WE belong to Christ," then they had no fault. But seeing they said "I belong to Christ," they definitely meant it so as to be distinct from others. Their seeming loyalty to Christ was one that sought to exclude others from Christ. Paul in responding to this did not pull his own people out and cause them to undermine others, rather he intreated them by the name of the Lord that they should be united and be of one mind. Not to be united behind him, but to be united in Christ who died for them.

Paul was the one who brought the gospel to them and could have easily won them all to himself. But rather he directed them to Christ. He indeed told them of this when he said, "For though ye

have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 Corinthians 4:15). This was at the tail end of the chiding about their division. This makes us to understand that he had enough argument to pull them all behind him and exclude the other apostles to make himself more glorious. But he didn't do that. Rather in chiding them he was more particular in condemning them for trying to claim allegiance to him more than he did in condemning them for claiming allegiance to the other apostles. Paul was not interested in their praise but in their obedience to Christ.

In asking them, "was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" he refocused their eyes to their Saviour. He took their eyes of adoration away from himself, from Peter, and from Apollos, and all other men to focus it back in the right direction; the direction of the Lord Jesus. This is the right response when people try to praise us. We should not accept it but direct the praise to God because all praise belongs to God and God alone. The psalmist also wrote, "But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." (Psalm 3:3). What does he mean when he calls God his glory? It means he has nothing to glory about. All his glory is found in God alone and not in himself, nor in the praises of others.

Even Jesus who is himself God showed us the same example of giving God the glory rather than accepting it to ourselves. The Bible said about Jesus, "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10:17 - 18). A non-

Christian pointed out this verse to me that even Jesus denied being God. But this statement of Jesus is not a denial of his deity. He only asked why he was called so and did not say he was not good. Not even in saying only God is good did he deny his deity for indeed he is that only God. It was necessary because the man did not have the revelation that he was God. The man seeing him merely as a teacher called him good which he only questioned because he was calling who he thought to be a mere man good. So Jesus corrected him that only God is good. If he had known that Jesus was himself God there should have been nothing wrong with calling him good. By this statement of Jesus we see the right response to give to people who praise us.

I shall talk more on the right response to praise in another book that shall be focused on church leadership God willing. For the subject at hand, it should suffice to know that all praise must be given back to God.

What about the praise from God?

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

(Luke 17:10)

If we are not to seek or accept praise from men, what about the praise from God? Paul says in where we read, "then shall every man have praise of God." What should then be our mindset about this? It is true that the praise of man is blind. It is true that the

praise of man is unjustifiable. It is true that the praise of man is received to our detriment. But seeing that that which comes from God is not so, what shall we then do about his praise?

While the praise of God is ever timely, ever good, ever justifiable, ever true, and all, we must still be careful about this else we may still wreck our faith. Careful not about the fact of its genuineness, but about our own self. We need to understand fully the true proclivities of our heart in our service to God. The expectation of the praise from God should never be a propelling factor in our well doing or in rendering of service to him, else we may wreck our faith and be unprepared when the Lord shall come. Let's look at why together.

Let's take a look at Luke 17:7-10 where it says, "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:7 - 10). Certainly God shall praise each man in due time, but we must not allow ourselves to be seeking it. You see, our calling is a call to humility and you cannot be humble and be seeking praise at the same time.

Is this explanation right about our relationship to God? Absolutely. If Jesus puts it forward as an illustration of our relationship to God, then it is absolutely right. But let's see why.

If you're paid heavily for a job, let's say as a receptionist for example, does your employer need to thank you for doing your job? Is your service a favour? Does your answering of calls and all that show an act of benevolence on your part. If you're paid heavily beyond what you should, are you not merely doing your duty? Do you not even in doing your duty maintain a grateful disposition to your employer? In all places where I worked and earned a salary I was happy to continue with, I know how eager I was to serve. I know how I craved for my employers to give me more assignments to do. In my thoughts I seem to be asking, "if you're paying me this much, I ought to justify it."

How much more when we talk about our relationship with God. God created us, gave us life and everything we enjoy in it. We were lost in sin and doomed for damnation but he saved us by the blood of his own Son. Arthur T. Pierson (1837-1911), puts it this way in his amazing hymn, The New Song;

*“How helpless and hopeless
we sinners had been,
If He never had loved us
till cleansed from our sin:”*

In the light of the knowledge of the wonderful things God has done for us, all that remains for us to do is total surrender, absolute submission, and devoted service that looks not for praise and reward.

Many have shipwrecked their faith in expectation of praise from God. There are people who served God yet after a while returned from following him because they didn't get their expected praise, commendation, or reward from God. Let us not be like them. We

have seen how true our relationship with God is and how the best we can do is merely a fulfilment of our duties.

After placing before us an instance of how a man serving his master is not thanked, that is thanked in a way to show that he's done a favour to his master, he went on to tell us, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." This means your focus should be on obedience and not on getting praise out of God. Obedience and obedience alone should be our goal.

It was Martin Luther (1483-1546) who said, "Find your praise in the testimony of a good conscience." When you have done ALL those things which are commanded you (this is not to mention our inability to do ALL), let it be the voice of your conscience that shall praise you and in that alone be content. This is what the Lord is saying to us in essence.

In our strife for obedience to God there are two ways our conscience can speak to us. Either it commends us when we succeed, or it condemns us when we fail. We must be careful about the way we respond to these voices. It is very easy, when you see yourself doing what God has commanded you and your conscience commending you, to become proud. That pride is a snare. While in this flesh, if we receive praise from God we ought to know why he does that lest we become puffed up. The Bible says, "And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." (Joshua 3:7). God sometimes magnify people, not make them big, for the purpose of ease of administration. He said he'd magnify Joshua. Why? The

next verse begins, "And thou shalt command..." (Joshua 3:8). So to be magnified is different from being big. Joshua was still a mere man. A dust like every other man, but God made him appear as if he were beyond that so as to enable him have the obedience of the people when he does command. He was still nothing. If it were not him it could have been anybody else. All the power he manifested belonged to God. He could have given it to just anyone he wishes to. The same way, if God does praise you, always remember your nothingness and never be puffed up. Know the reason of the praise and fulfil it. We can see this humility despite manifesting great power in the lives of all the apostles. Let us follow that example.

It is also important that we know that while in the flesh there are times when we may fail in our pursuit to do his will. We shouldn't in such circumstance become downcast and give up. In the doing of God's will, we must consciously strive to remain humble and continue in well doing and devoted service. If we are not careful to remain humble, it won't be long before pride shall swallow us whole. And we should be careful not to allow guilt sink us down into damnation. I'm not contradicting what I've said before, we must never seek to silence our conscience so as not to allow our guilt sink us down, but when we fail in our pursuit to do his will, we must repent, be contrite, and allow God to lift us up, then we should continue with our service to God.

God Shall Not Rob Any Of His Praise

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love,

which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

(Hebrews 6:10)

As I've said, failure to give people the praise that is due them amounts to robbery. However, you can be sure that, as Christians living in a non-Christian world, you shall be continually robbed of your praise. That is a guarantee. Job, a righteous man had this to say in Job 12:4, "I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright man is laughed to scorn."

The praise that should have been given you at times would rather be given to a scoundrel. People shall praise bad works but scorn your good works. Christian ladies, be warned. People shall mock you for decency and for dressing modestly, but they shall praise and celebrate immodest and profane people. That is a robbery the Lord shall judge. This is another way in which if we should let the praise of men be what spurs us to good works, when we experience such robbery it shall have a damaging effect on our well doing.

No matter how much we are robbed of our praise we can be rest assured that God shall never rob any man of his praise. Robbery of praise can only come to us from men. God shall reward us both here on earth and also in Heaven eternally. These rewards are not without their praise. The Bible says, "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day

when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." (Malachi 3:16 - 18). There is a book of remembrance and there shall be manifestations here in the earth that shall distinguish those that serve God and obey him and those that don't. This distinction is with much praise as we all know that the word distinction connotes granting of unequalled excellence and making that conspicuous to others. That my brothers and sisters is praise and glorification. So let us be rest assured that praise shall come in due time even in this present life but we must not allow our service to God and well doing to be driven by the expectation of it.

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." (Revelation 21:7). Apart from glorification while in the flesh, there shall also be a more sure time of exceeding eternal reward and glorification, but these rewards come only to the overcomers. Who receives a medal of honour while the battle is raging? Who receives a glory while not yet an overcomer? To be that overcomer, your well doing and service to God must not be propelled by the expectation of praise from God while not yet an overcomer. If you let the expectation of praise from God be the propelling factor in your good works, it may not be long before you run out of steam. Rather, keep up the good work and as I've said before quoting Martin Luther (1483-1546), "Find your praise in the testimony of a good conscience," and thus you shall overcome.

Conclusion

"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:26)

So we see that praise has little and close to nothing to do with us whether in giving or in receiving it. Desiring it from man or even from God is unwise. Focus on obedience. Obedience and obedience alone should be our goal. Let obedience and the consequent voice of a good conscience be our satisfaction. Let our ability to obey (take heed) or failure to do so be what defines our value. If you succeed don't be proud, if you fail, keep striving. Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take heed. Keep his commandment.

So in all circumstances, let us learn to respond rightly to praise from wherever it comes. Let us always remember that our calling is a calling to humility. Let us not seek praise whatsoever, but watch diligently against the love of it and against it in its self. May God help us all in Jesus' name. Amen.

***Prayer:** Dear God and Father, we see that it is harmful to praise and to accept praise from men seeing how little we know. Help us to be wise not to be desirous of vain glory. It is true that praise has its good if rightly done, but give us wisdom not to praise foolishly for any reason at all. As we watch against the love of praise, help us to constant in well doing and be prepared when the Lord Jesus shall return. In his dear name we pray. Amen.*

SECTION 4

PRAYING

PRAYER

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

(1 Peter 4:7)

So the summary of everything about being prepared is this: take heed (listen, be willing to obey, obey), watch for that day and watch against anything that would make you not be prepared for that glorious day, and lastly pray. The first two things to do in preparing for the second coming of Christ, taking heed and watching, naturally leads to the third, prayer. The words of apostle Peter puts it well, "watching unto prayer." The taking heed and watching that does not lead to prayer are all in vain. This first thing in being prepared, taking heed, can be likened to going to a market place to buy a variety of foodstuff: rice, tomato, maggi, onions, spices, and all. You can't just begin to eat them. Yes they are foodstuff, but should you eat them that way you'd die. You must first of all wash and prepare them. This preparation I'll liken to watching. That too is not enough. You must put them into a pot and cook them. This final part of the process is what I liken to prayer. If you take heed and don't pray, you'd die. If you watch and don't pray, you'd die too but by poisoning. If you don't take heed and you don't watch, you may have cooking utensils to cook but there'd be nothing to cook, so you'd still die but by starvation. Same way, when you don't take heed and don't watch, there'd be nothing to pray about. You'd still be unprepared. So all three are important and on this note we must look at the final injunction in being prepared for the

second coming of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The third thing we need to do in preparing for our Lord's coming is prayer and I don't think we can misdefine what prayer means. We know it is talking with God, making our petitions known to him and all that. But let's take a closer look.

The Vanity Of Aimless Prayer

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

(Matthew 6:7)

I am not one that believes that prayer should be prayed for just praying's sake. I don't believe that prayer that is born of nothing in particular is effective. There are people who believe that so far prayer is prayed it is bound to be effective. So they stir the passion of people with superstitions, and by this they'd try to move people to pray. Some will tell you a closed mouth is a closed destiny. But how they come to such a conclusion baffles me. What the Bible tells me however is that a closed mouth is the mouth of the person who shall be considered wise (Proverbs 17:28). We have far more command to listen than to speak, and by speaking I also mean prayer. Some would tell you that when you go in the way and you notice your face is catching some cobweb, it is the work of evil ones making you to forget the things you've read. I heard that on campus, so students would pray against evil spirits operating through those cobwebs. What sort of evil spirit requires cobwebs to operate? Spiderman Evil

Spirit? That's a new one.

Many Christians took the issue of aimless prayer to another level so much that some unbelievers sang a song that being translated from pidgin English to correct English means, "I will pray until lions would start eating grass. I will pray until rats would start chasing cats..." They went on on and on saying impossible things they'd pray for. People may not see it so, but I believe that was a direct mockery on people who pray aimlessly. Even unbelievers see the absurdity of aimless prayer, how come there are many professing Christians who think such prayers are effective.

People often pray aimlessly because they think that it is the length of prayer that makes it effective despite Jesus' clear debunking of that claim. Prayers must be born of an authentic knowledge and particular desire respecting that knowledge. Why would prayer for what you don't know be answered? For example, praying against the operations of "Spiderman Evil Spirit" when there's nothing like that. A prayer like this that is bound to go unanswered is an ineffective prayer.

Even in the book of Proverbs we have an assurance that the prayers of those who fail to take heed to God's command shall be an abomination to him, thus it shall most definitely go unanswered. It says, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." (Proverbs 28:9). So, taking heed and watching is necessary for prayers regarding our preparedness for the second coming of Christ to be effective. Such prayer must be based on the knowledge gained by heeding and watching. For this reason, taking heed and watching must precede prayer.

The Richness Of Prayer Resulting From Taking Heed And Watching

*"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray
for you..."*
(Colossians 1:9)

Now effective prayer must be born of something tangible in particular. When we read through the Psalms and indeed all the prayers of scriptures, there's always something that makes the saints to cry unto God, and it is obvious that they didn't pray aimlessly or pray unnecessarily long prayers. They didn't cook stories of unseen spiritual warfares. They didn't ask God to engage Spiderman spirits in a vigorous warfare. They had a desire that was born of something tangible, and pouring out their hearts to God he answered them.

Paul's statement in Colossians 1:9 above, is a good example of praying with reason. Note the words, "for this cause..." This is the same with all the prayers we see in scriptures. They were based on tangible reason and not superstitions. Paul in the verse above prayed for the Christians of Colosse because he heard the testimony of their love. Same way all our prays should founded on a reason.

As I said before, these first things, taking heed and watching, naturally leads to the third. Every single thing you do in preparing for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ must

bring up within us a sense of total perplexity. Therefore, if indeed we take heed and watch, our prayer to God shall be born of countless tangible things to pray for.

Take for example when we take heed to the written word of God, we shall see in it, like looking into a mirror, our flaws, our sins, and the impending doom that is coming for all sinners. What do we do in this case? Commit suicide? No, we run to the place of prayer. When the speaking word of God tells us to quit a particular bad habit of which we feel weak to resist, what do we do? In despair ignore the consequences? No, we run to the place of prayer. When we take heed to the voice of our conscience pricking us for our wrongdoing, what do we do? Rebuke the conscience? No, we run to the place of prayer. Likewise when we watch against ourselves, the spirit of the Antichrist, the contempt of men, and the praise of men. The Bible says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6). Everything must bring us to this point of prayer. It is by this means that our prayer shall be effective.

I know many preachers before they delve into aimless prayer would usually quote scriptures bringing verses from here and there in defence of their aimless prayer, but my advice to the Christian reader is this, avoid praying for things you don't see in scriptures. Let the things you pray for be things that you see Jesus pray and other things born out of your quest to do the will and command of God. Leave off superstitious prayers. Leave off praying against witches and wizards which have no power over you whatsoever. If your salvation is not sufficient to set you free from their influence, then what makes you think your prayer would? Leave off praying for the death of your enemies of which

you don't know who they are. Leave off praying for ancestral curses because even if they're true, you're free from them in Christ. Let us not pray speculatively. But let us commit all things into the hand of God who knows all things. Let the example we see in the life of Christ and his holy apostles set the pattern by which we pray.

When the apostles were persecuted by the authorities of Israel, they didn't pray foolishly asking for the death of their persecutors, rather they ran to God the way a little boy would run to his father and cry, "And now, Lord, behold their threatening..." (Acts 4:29). They trusted God with a simple childlike trust to do the right. They didn't ask for the killing of their enemies, their downfall, but they only asked God to see their actions knowing that God in his supreme wisdom knows what to do. If it is to kill, he shall kill. If it is to bring about their downfall, he shall bring about it. If it is to grant them a repentant heart, he shall do so. Leave judgment to God. You just commit everything into his almighty hands in simple prayer and trust his wisdom shall always bring forth that which is right and just. But let your passionate prayer be based on those things that your desire to do God's will just the way the apostles did. After asking God to behold the threatenings of the adversary, they went on, "...grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30). They only asked for boldness to continue doing what God had commanded them in the face of persecution. Is it any wonder that their prayer was so effective? In fact it was effective that on the very spot they got an answer to their prayer as we read, "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." (Acts 4:31). Let us follow their examples in simplicity and not bother ourselves with superstitions of witchcraft, spider man evil spirit, etc.

A. B. Simpson, in his book, "Wholly Sanctified," rightly said, "This is the secret of all true prayer, to pray in the Lord Jesus, asking what He would ask and as He would ask it." So we ought to pray as he did. He prayed for our salvation so earnestly. We too ought to pray most earnestly for it, and with knowledge. He prayed passionately for the unity of his church. We too ought to pray passionately for the unity of the church. His prayers were informed by his knowledge of the will of God and of his mission here on earth. Is it any wonder that it was so effective? Our prayers also must be informed by the knowledge of the will of God and of our God given mission here on earth. Every prayer outside this is bound to be ineffective.

In this section, as we look at a few things concerning prayer, we must bear in mind that effective prayer must be guided by knowledge and must be born of tangible things. Amen.

***Prayer:** Dear God and Father, just as the disciples asked the Lord, "teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), we too ask teach us Lord to pray. Not to pray the prayers of the foolish and unwise, but being taught by you may we pray meaningful and effectual prayer that avails much. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

THE COMMAND TO PRAY

*"Continue in prayer..."
(Colossians 4:2)*

I think the most important reason why we ought to pray is because, like to take heed and to watch, prayer is also commanded. So before we even talk about the immense benefit of prayer, we must understand that we are commanded to pray. Failure to pray is therefore a sin. It is for this reason we ought to be surprised when Christians think prayer is an option. It is not an option, it is mandatory for a Christian to pray. Whether it is of benefit or not is of little importance. So far it is commanded, we must pray.

We are commanded to pray in two ways. One is by expressed verbal command, and the other is commandment by example.

Written Commands To Pray

*"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."
(1 Peter 4:7)*

There various commands to pray in the Bible and here are some:

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." (Mark 13:33)

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." (Romans 12:12)

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." (Ephesians 6:18)

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." (1 Timothy 2:1)

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." (1 Timothy 2:8)

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2)

So you see we have a host of commandments to pray throughout scriptures. He who fails to pray therefore is a sinner. A grievous one. Let us therefor heed the command to pray.

The Prayer Life Of Jesus

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and

supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."

(Hebrews 5:7)

Apart from the verbal command to pray, we also have a form of command to pray which is by the laid down example of the life of Christ. The things that Jesus says are commands, but the things he did also must be taken as commands too. When Jesus says, "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12). By this statement, Christ meant that we ought to follow his footsteps. And for this reason his actions becomes a command.

This is what we read about his baptism: "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened..." (Luke 3:21). That was the beginning of his ministry. It began by prayer.

He continued all through his earthly ministry praying. It is written, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." (Mark 1:35). It is also written, "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone." (Matthew 14:23). And again, "And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, "Whom say the people that I am?" (Luke 9:18). All through his life it was evidently his habit to seek solitary place to pray to God. The night before his crucifixion, he spent the whole night in a passionate prayer before God. A prayer that was so intense that

his sweat became like blood, for it is written, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44).

The last word he spake as he gave up the ghost was a prayer, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." (Luke 23:46).

So, it is clear that one major thing that characterised the life of Jesus was his prayer life. He started his ministry with prayer, went through it in prayer, and ended his earthly ministry in prayer. For that reason, a life of devoted prayer is a command. Failure to do this would be to live in darkness. "... he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness..." says the Lord.

***Prayer:** Dear Father, you have commanded us to live a life of devoted prayerfulness by your written word and by the laid down example of your dear Son and our Saviour. Help us now and everyday to obey this command and by this stand strong and live a victorious Christian life. Keep me ready and ever praying to meet a favourable day on the Lord's return. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

*"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
(James 5:16)*

Apart from the command of prayer, another reason why we must pray is the importance of prayer. In this chapter we shall be taking a look at the importance of prayer.

Understanding The Manifold Difficulties Of Getting To Heaven

*"When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying,
Who then can be saved?"
(Matthew 19:25)*

The apostles asked Jesus the question above when he said it is impossible for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Seeing they asked, "Who then can be saved?" It makes us to understand that it was already concluded that it is easier for the rich to be saved than for the poor. Who's more likely to steal? The poor. Who's more likely to tell lies? The poor. Who's more likely to fornicate (probably not having what it takes to get

married)? The poor. So it becomes clear that if even the rich cannot be saved, then being saved is not just hard, but impossible.

Jesus confirmed that it is true that being saved is impossible when he answered their question saying, "With men this is impossible..." (Matthew 19:26). It is impossible by the virtue of the manifold difficulties before us in getting to heaven. But there's a good news. He continues, "...but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26). This is where prayer comes in. This is why we need to ask him to whom nothing is impossible to come to our aid in this impossible quest of entering the kingdom of God.

The difficulties that become obvious in taking heed and watching according to what we've looked at in this book can be summarised in these:

- The high demand of being saved.
- The exceeding sinfulness of our nature.
- The great deceptions before and around us.
- Persecutions that must come to us in well doing.

When taking heed and watching brings before us this immense difficulties by which our entry into the kingdom of God becomes impossible, we must bring them to God in prayer. The knowledge of this isn't enough, but it is in the light of these knowledge that we must pray effective prayer.

The Proper Knowledge Of What's At Stake Eternally

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

(Matthew 16:26)

The importance of prayer becomes glaring when we see what's at stake eternally. What is at stake is not a momentary discomfort. Not some momentary anguish, but an eternal one. One that is without end. When I think of Hell and Heaven, I get filled with terror. The thought of missing Heaven is so terrifying. It wouldn't be so terrifying if it were a matter of having a fixed duration no matter the length. If it were so, each passing second would be worth jubilating over because one knows his anguish is a second closer to an end. But it is not so in this case. The anguish of hell shall be for ever and ever. When a man has spent ten million years there, he still has no less days to spend there than when he first begun. That my brothers and sisters is terrifying.

A man said if heaven and hell are the way the Bible puts it, he'd be willing to go on broken bottles on his knees a thousand miles to get to heaven. But if you go on broken bottles on your knees a thousand miles, it won't get you to heaven. It lacks the efficacy to do that, but prayer can. By prayer you don't have to go on broken bottles. You don't have to go a thousand miles in such pain. Prayer to the One, True, Living, Almighty God would get you there.

When we see that all these hindrances to our eternal abode can only be surmounted by prayer, boy, how important prayer is. If working for a company can clothe you, provide you shelter, cater for the needs of your family and supply you all other necessities of life, that work is very important even if it is very demeaning. The same way, if by prayer you could avert such eternal anguish, then prayer is very important even if it seem little compared to other things people are willing to do to enter the kingdom of heaven like going on broken bottles on the knees.

For this reason, we must ask God, by praying to avert our impending damnation. For with our strength and that of everybody else, entering the kingdom of heaven is impossible. But with God all things are possible.

Prayer: A Source Of Incredible Power

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

(James 5:16)

Prayer is a source of incredible power. Just as we've seen that with God there's nothing impossible, prayer invites his almightiness into your situations. The night before Jesus was betrayed to be crucified, he said to Peter saying, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41). Jesus noted that Peter was weak and put forward prayer as a solution to that. The failure of Peter when he denied the Lord thrice was based on his failure to pray. When he changed and became a praying man, he

began to do wondrous works of power for God.

In the bid to stress the power of prayer James wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James 5:16 - 18). You may ask who is a righteous man? A righteous man is he who believes the word of God is true and lives his life accordingly, not necessarily a totally morally upright man for such don't exist. The prayer of such a man is effectual. Though he may not be perfect, yet his prayer is able to give him the strength to be perfect.

Prayer is so powerful that we're admonished, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6). So take a careful look at each and every obstacle in our heavenward way one after the other. Observe them carefully and know with absolute conviction that none is beyond being surmounted by the power of prayer.

The High Demand Of Entering Heaven

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

(Matthew 5:20)

One thing that makes entering heaven impossible is the high demand attached to it. This becomes glaring when we take heed to the written and speaking voice of God. When we look into those words, we shall begin to see and hear great things that shall make us to tremble and exceedingly shake.

For example, Jesus tells us in the verse above that "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees must be very high indeed.

Righteousness is founded on knowledge, wisdom, judgment, and discipline. Knowledge is to know the commandment given to us. To know what is commanded us to do and what not to do. If you don't know what is right or wrong, how shall you know how to be righteous? Even if you do that which is right accidentally without knowing it was right, how shall it be imputed as righteousness? Wisdom can be said to be the right application of knowledge. This is necessary for knowledge of right and wrong does not automatically yield righteousness or a will to be righteous. It takes the wise to choose the right when he sees it as opposed to wrong. Judgment is the ability to draw proper conclusion on matters. It is your conclusions after considering all the factors present before you that shall dictate what you wish to do or not. And discipline is the control you have over yourself. In the face of temptation, it takes not just knowledge, wisdom, or judgment to do right, but discipline. And we see all these qualities in the Pharisees.

They had knowledge, wisdom, and judgment, else Christ would

not have said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." (Matthew 23:2 - 3). Even though Jesus asks us not to do after their works, yet it is obvious that they also had discipline, for Jesus Christ said they prayed lengthy prayers, fast often, pay tithe of their minutest gain, and other things they do. So they had a form of righteousness. But even that righteousness is not such by which one can be saved.

The righteousness by which a man can be saved is far beyond what mere men can achieve, yet God shall not bring his standards down for the sake of any man. Rather, he's willing to bring you up to his standards if only you'd pray.

Grace By Prayer

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

(Hebrews 4:16)

All grace to fulfil God's command can be gotten by prayer. The grace to know the will of God, the wisdom, judgment, and discipline to be righteous can all be gotten by prayer. The verse above tells us to come boldly unto the throne of grace... and find grace to help in time of need. The act of coming to the throne of grace refers to prayer. Coming to God in prayer to find mercy and grace in time of need.

Surely we who have such humongous obstacles as we endeavour to get to heaven are ever in need of this grace. Paul who knew that we can obtain knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding through prayer wrote, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:9 - 10). We all can be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding by prayer. It is in the same vain that James wrote, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5).

One of the points Jesus always emphasised is the absolute willingness of God to grant us our desires. He expressed this well when he said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7 - 11). So God is ever willing to give us whatever good thing we ask for. Now we must note however that the things we call good are not the things he calls good. When we say good, we may think of things like a nice jeep, private jets, fine shoes, expensive clothes, etc. but this is not what Jesus calls good. If we are to reverse Jesus' question we'd get something like, "how many of you would your son ask for a snake or a

scorpion and would give it to him?" The answer to that too is simple; no one. The things that are good are the things that are good for your soul not those that destroy or is capable of destroying it. So when you pray for the good of your soul, God shall doubtless give it to you. The salvation of your soul is not just good but best. For this reason, the grace to meet his requirements of salvation of your precious soul can be easily gotten by means of prayer. You can trust him for that.

The Sinful Inveteracy Of Our Nature

*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
 (Romans 3:23)*

*"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"
 (Romans 7:24)*

Another key obstacle is our exceeding sinfulness. It is not a matter of pointing accusing finger around and saying, "that guy or those guys are exceedingly sinful," but the truth of scriptures is that "all are exceeding sinful." That is why it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10).

Our exceeding sinfulness becomes particularly glaring when we pay close attention to the voice of our conscience and when we watch against ourselves. When we begin to examine our hearts we start observing the sinfulness that were not glaring to us in the past. Not just the sinfulness of our hearts alone but the

inveteracy of its sinfulness, and that is the most perplexing aspect of it. It is one thing to be conscious of ones sins, it is another to know of its inveteracy which reveals to us that though we repent of sins we find in our members, we know we're likely to fall often to the same sin except we maintain a daily fight against it.

That I can tell you from experience is very perplexing. How sweet life would be if one could maintain a holy life without having to strive daily against sin and temptations. The pressures of sin press us daily so that having a will to be holy is not sufficient for being holy. Such a nature that is so prone to defilement is unfit in itself to be in pursuit of eternal life.

Understanding what a hinderance our sinful nature poses to our entering the kingdom of heaven, an old time hymnographer known as Joseph the Hymnographer (?-883 AD), wrote these words:

*"And wilt Thou pardon, Lord,
A sinner such as I,
Although Thy book his crimes record,
Of such a crimson dye?"*

*So deep are they engraved,
So terrible their fear,
The righteous scarcely shall be saved,
And where shall I appear?"*

Cleansing By Prayer

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

(Hebrews 12:14)

When through taking heed we come yet to this realisation, we still find a solution in prayer. Here, another major thing that makes prayer to be indispensable is its efficacy in making us holy.

It is written, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:4 - 5). If the very food we eat, the very flesh of uncontrite animals, can be cleansed by the word of God and prayer, how much more shall our very contrite hearts be cleansed by the word of God and prayer. If without holiness no man shall see the Lord, by extension it means, without the word of God and prayer no man shall see the Lord.

Understanding also the power of prayer, Joseph the Hymnographer (?-883 AD), despite being fully conscious of the perplexity our sinful nature places us continues his hymn with this prayer:

*"O Thou Physician blest,
Make clean my guilty soul
And me, by many a sin oppressed,
Restore and keep me whole.*

*I know not how to praise
Thy mercy and Thy love;
But deign my soul from earth to raise
And learn from Thee above."*

The Greatness Of Deception

*"For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs
and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."
(Mark 13:22)*

When one watches against the spirit of the Antichrist, one would see the magnitude of the deceptions by which he deceives and wonder how can one ever escape being deceived? The deception of the Antichrist is so great, as we have spoken about before, so much that it is impossible not to be deceived.

As I write these lines, many have began seeing the deception of many preachers of today. How they weave lies to extort the poor. Despite these, some are so grounded in their deceptions that they seem irredeemable. A friend of mine posts articles about these deceptions explaining why people should not allow themselves to be deceived, but you need to here the criticisms that come his way. He's saying the truth, but the deception being so great, many see it as a lie. People are so deceived by these preachers that they see the person telling them the truth as one sinking fast into hell. They see him as the right hand man to the Devil.

If the deceptions were not so great, men would not be this confused about the truth. I too was very well fooled that in my article on tithes, I wrote on "The Fool I Almost Remained." I was so fooled and believed so much in tithes that I thought by paying one tenth of my pocket money I was buying God and his favour. Funny for me, almost all my prayers I prayed for in my tithing days went unanswered. God indeed disregarded them. But after coming to the knowledge of the truth I see him answering my prayers, guiding my every step and prospering my every effort.

Deliverance From Deception By Prayer

"He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight."

(Psalm 72:14)

Just as I said about the "Fool I Almost Remained," the only time I came to realise the truth about most things was by miracle and God's favour. It was by God's mercy that I began to realise the truth, slowly and steadily. So I am not really surprised when I see people so blinded because I've been there.

The psalmist in Psalm 72:14 says, "He shall redeem their soul from deceit." It takes redemption to be free from deceit. For this reason, we can conclude that deceit is like death. It is what must happen to every living soul. Just like in the case of death, we can only be redeemed from it. No one can think, read, or be taught out of it. None can save any man from what only God can

redeem. Only God can redeem men from the power of deception.

Christ says, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (John 16:13). The Spirit of truth is he who can guide us into all truth. Without his guidance you cannot arrive at the truth but shall remain in the realms of deception and madness.

It is this Spirit of truth that Christ says we can get by prayer and that God is ever willing to answer such prayer (Luke 11:13). Also to have the wisdom to decipher what is the truth, we can also get this by prayer (James 1:5).

For this reason, only God can save us from the wiles of the enemy and his many deceptions. If we must be free from it, we must run to God in prayer. Let us continue to pray to God to redeem our souls from deceit, and continuously commit our souls into his hands for safe keeping.

Tribulations

*"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."
(Acts 14:22)*

Another obstacle before each and every Christian is tribulations.

It must come in one way or the other. It is clearly written, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). Do you want to enter into the kingdom of God? Do you want to be ready when the Lord shall come and enter with him into the kingdom of God? Get ready for tribulation. It is not a probability, it is not a high probability, but a certainty. "We must," says the apostle.

The contempt men thrust on us is just one of the many persecutions that come our way. It may seem light, but it has a very crushing psychological effect. The praise men accord us also, though enjoyable, is also a way of putting us through the fining pot (Proverbs 27:21). Praise should not have been seen as a tribulation if not for the way it effectively militates against the progress of our heavenward journey. For this reason, it is a tribulation all the same. Other forms of tribulations are not more damaging than praise to our heavenward journey but they are just undesirable and unpleasant. Tribulations such as denial of rights, persecutions, and even being killed. All these are a form of tribulation.

The very statement of our Lord confirms that where he says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23). I repeat, do you want to follow Jesus into the kingdom of God when he shall come? Take up your cross daily. That cross is not devoid of tribulations and persecutions. These have to be borne daily.

So make no mistake about it, tribulations are in the way of all them that shall enter into the kingdom of God. How many people can bare tribulations? Do we for this reason seek to escape

tribulation only to end up in hell? The way to overcome this is also by prayer.

Strength To Persevere By Prayer

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

(Romans 12:12)

"Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

(Psalm 27:14)

When it comes to praying for the way out in terms of persecution, it is important to note the prayer of the psalmist. He didn't say, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall put an end to your tribulations..." Rather he says, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart..." (Psalm 27:14). The strengthening of the heart is the most important when it comes to facing tribulations.

I know it is very natural to have an escapist expectation when one approaches God for help in times of tribulations, even Jesus prayed that the cup of tribulation of which he was about to drink should be removed from him (Luke 22:42). So it is very natural for us to seek God's intervention for removal of tribulations, but it is not God's will that we should be altogether without tribulations. Concerning other things it is God's will that we should be without them. For example, it is God's will that we

should be altogether without sin. It is his will that we should be completely delivered and free from deceptions. It is his will for us to meet his exceeding high demands for entering into heaven. But it is not his will that we should be altogether without tribulations.

I came to the realisation of this truth at a point of distress in my life. I was in dire need of comfort and assurance. I needed a promise that all shall be well. I needed a promise that what was confronting me will come to a quick and abrupt end. It was a usual thing to get these comforts when I read my Bible in my quiet time. But that day I read Psalms 27 and found no promise of deliverance, rather I found a promise of strength. I felt bad about this. I needed assurance of deliverance but instead the promise of strength sounded to me like an assurance that my fears are going to be realised and I must go through these things I dreaded. Indeed I found myself going through so many unpleasantness and my fears were realised, but I went through them in the strength of the Lord and came out stronger and more refined.

Apostle Paul also wrote saying, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." (Romans 12:12). Mark the words, "patient in tribulation." There's nowhere in scriptures we find support for being dodgy about tribulations. We are admonished here to be patient in tribulation. Note also the words, "continuing instant in prayer." We cannot be patient in tribulation without the strength we derive from the place of prayer. We should only be bothered about our strength to overcome whatsoever it may be that shall come our way. We should work on ourselves prayerfully to build our faith and strengthen our hearts to be true Christian soldiers, able to face

whatever life presents us with. Let us be like apostle Paul who said, "we glory in tribulations." (Romans 5:3). Let us not flee from it but seek strength to embrace it.

Let us be clear on this, my brethren, life is just a brief moment. Your real life is in Heaven. It is not important whether or not you go through hard times or sweet times while in the flesh. What is important is that you have enough strength to win the day. This is why what was important to the psalmist was the strengthening of the heart and not deliverance. It is not in vain that it is written severally in scriptures, "he that overcometh..." Heaven, where our real life is to be lived, is for overcomers. And how do people become overcomers without tribulations?

Jesus also says, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13). People don't endure good things. Who in this world endures a good meal for example? It is only unpleasant things that people endure. Enduring unto the end entails going through unpleasant things till the end. Only such shall be saved. My brethren, let not the Devil fool us into the expectation of ease. Even if we find ourselves well able to afford ease, we must put that ease aside and keep pressing on in toilsome service to God. Though Christ prayed for the cup to pass from him, yet he faced all the bitterness and anguish of the crucifixion. We too may pray all we want, but if we must enter heaven we must go through tribulations. So to overcome tribulation is not to avoid it, but to go through it in the strength of the Most High.

If we keep thinking of living a our lives in a way that shall keep tribulations away, we shall not be ready for the second coming of the Lord Jesus. To be ready, we must walk on manfully like

soldiers with no fear of what life may thrust at us for our well doing and service to God. There's no greater tribulation than that which Christ faced, and there was no grief like his. But as incredibly big as his tribulation he found strength to overcome in the place of prayer. After praying to God in the anguish of his soul, we read, "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." (Luke 22:43). Jesus gained strength to face tribulations on his knees. The angel didn't come to whisk him away, or give him strength to run away so fast as to escape the tribulation before him, rather he strengthened him to face it. And in the strength of his praying hour he overcame the world. What wondrous power we have in prayer.

Christ says, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34 - 36). The only thing that ease can afford us is unworthiness to go with Christ when he shall return. So let us pray now and always for strength to go through tribulations manfully.

Conclusion

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

(Philippians 4:6).

We could go on and on talking about the power of prayer, but we'll stop here. The more we look into the benefits of prayer, the more we understand the wisdom of the verse above that says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6). It is a force with a power that is far above all the challenges the world can place before us. Seeing the importance of prayer, it is easy to know that; it is only best that the man that desires to be ready when the Lord shall come should be a praying being as much as he is a thinking being. Everything he thinks about should be prayed about. "In everything by prayer."

Let us be sure that if we must be ready when the Lord shall come, it must be by the power of God we get in the place of prayer. For this reason, we must persevere in the place of prayer. Brothers and sisters, "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Prayer: Father we see that your word indeed asks that we should be careful for nothing. This also means we ought not to bother ourselves about the host of things that threaten to pose a hinderance to our heavenward journey. All we are to do is present these things to you in prayer and supplication. Thank you o Father for the gift of prayer. Help us to be praying Christians all our lives till we meet you above. In Jesus' dear name we pray. Amen.

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

(Colossians 4:12)

Now let us also look at the practice of prayer. How we ought to pray as we wait for his coming. We shall see the importance and benefit of praying every time and everywhere, the importance and benefit of interceding, and the importance and benefit of fasting.

Pray Every Time

"Pray without ceasing."

(1 Thessalonians 5:17)

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

(Romans 12:12)

We are commanded to pray without ceasing. We ought to pray

every time. The life of a Christian ought to be a life of unceasing prayer. We are not just to pray when we feel like it or are in the mood, we are to pray even when we don't feel like praying.

Some people like to put forward the claim that prayer is a two way conversation between you and God, but it is not always a two way conversation. By this they claim that prayer is a form of talking to God of which he's bound to respond. For example, "Good morning heavenly Father," Bob said in deep reverence. "Hello my child," responded God. "I have come to ask for help," said Bob again. "Really? What help?" God said with a concerned look, "I'd really like to know what it is this time." And on and on. But prayer is not meant to be that way. Even after a lengthy prayer, God can choose not to answer at all despite having nothing against you.

Prayer of inquiry can be seen as a prayer intended for a conversation, but though you intend it for conversation it rarely results in a conversation. Prayer usually is just telling God how you feel, how much you appreciate his goodness, what you need, etc. There's nothing that warrants a conversational type of response from God. That is why we are to pray believing for it is written, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them..." (Mark 11:24). If there were no reason for the natural man to doubt we would not be commanded here to believe. What other reason do we have to doubt than not receiving an audible response from God. But as Christians we, when we pray, we believe and pray with confidence. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." (1 John 5:14).

So we must pray even when God is silent. We must always examine our ways to see if there's any sin un-repented of and make amends when there is, as I've spoken in the chapter about taking heed to the voice of the conscience, but where we are convinced in our spirit that our ways are right with God, let us just pray without ceasing whether or not we get a response. All through the ministry of Christ, we rarely hear of him pray to God and receive a direct response to his prayer. Even when he prayed at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36), he prayed saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39). God did not respond but he kept praying. We read how that he came and met his disciples sleeping after which he went back and continued praying despite not receiving any response from God, not as a fool talking to a wall, but he, as one who is spiritual and knows his Father well, prayed believing. Even when the angel came to strengthen him, it was not in response to a direct prayer such as, "o Father, send an angel to comfort me."

So, a conversation that happens this way cannot be said to be a two way conversation. It should even scarcely be called a conversation. If we present prayer as a conversation, it then means the moment the other party stops respond we ought to stop too. It would be close to madness to continue speaking in such a case. In fact, if prayer should be described as communication or conversation, the only thing you'd say briefly before stumping out of your place of prayer is, "hello Lord. Hello? Are you there..." And when you get no response, you should be quite crazy to continue such a "conversation." I would therefore want us to understand that prayer is simply letting our desires known to God. As his children, it shall be an act of reverence to accept both his words and silence with utmost gratitude rather

than come up with arguments that would make us embark on an endless search for a nonexistent sin when God chooses to keep quiet, or charge God foolishly with meanness towards his poor creatures. Indeed God does speak, but it depends on him to choose whether or not to speak, and when and how to respond to our prayers.

So we must pray at all times. Whether we are in the mood or not, whether we feel like it or not, whether God is responding or not, we must just pray and believe that he hears us. And when we believe he shall do that which is best at the best time.

The battles before us on our heavenward journey requires endless and incessant prayer. Everytime you face a challenge (and they shall be many), we mustn't wait till a so called appropriate time. Right there and then present it to God in prayer. Form the habit of praying always.

Pray Everywhere

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

(1 Timothy 2:8)

The command to pray without ceasing naturally makes us to understand that we are to pray everywhere which brings us to our next point. We find this expressly commanded in the verse above.

The life of a Christian should go beyond that of a sanctuary prayer to that of a universal pray-er. When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman saying, "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." (John 4:21), he meant that the location of worship does not matter anymore. The same applies to prayer. Our prayer place should not be localised.

It is good to have a place of prayer, but such a place should not be considered a holy place by which our prayer becomes more acceptable to God or a place where all our prayers are to be restricted to. Rather, just like in choosing a place of regular study, one needs to choose a place where he can spend a considerable amount of time in prayer without distraction of any kind. A place that also meets the command of our Lord when he says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret..." (Matthew 6:6). It is not that the closet is holier than the market square, rather the closet affords you secrecy which in turn affords you sincerity. It is that which you pray between you and God that is most sincere. What you about and how you pray in public are often showy and less sincere. Jesus often resorted to the mountain to pray, not because it is closer to God than other surrounding lower lands, but because it is a place devoid of distraction. He goes through the strain of climbing a mountain, knowing that others wouldn't want to go through that stress, just because he wants a private place to pray effectively. So every Christian should have a place of passionate prayer.

So I'm not ruling out the fact that we must have a place of prayer, but our prayer must not be restricted to that place or anywhere else. Jesus didn't restrict his prayer to the mountain

top, he prayed everywhere. He prayed at his baptism, he prayed at Lazarus' tomb, he prayed everywhere including on the cross. He In fact died in prayer.

à Kempis Thomas wrote concerning devoted Christians of old the following, "By day they laboured, and at night they gave themselves oftentimes unto prayer; yea, even when they were labouring they ceased not from mental prayer." So you can see that they laboured in day time and prayed at night, but he went back to say, "yea, even when they were labouring they ceased not from mental prayer." They kept praying even in their mind and communing (maybe not "communicating" though) with God as they laboured. This mental prayer did not make them discard the need for a specific place and time for prayer. The person who must be ready when the Lord shall come must pray everywhere and every time.

These (praying every time and praying always) also are line with the admonition that says, "... in every thing by prayer and supplication..." (Philippians 4:6). So we are to pray every time this way. We are to commit everything to God in prayer every moment in mental prayer. We are to pray when we wake in the morning. We are to pray when we eat. We're to pray when commuting. We are to pray when at work. We are to pray every time, everywhere, and about everything. When things come up, we mustn't wait until we get to that appropriate place, rather we must pray right there and then in mental prayer. But we must also have our special place and time of prayer.

Intercede

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"

(Ephesians 6:18)

Another important aspect of praying in preparation for the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is intercession. This is a prayer you pray for another. Intercession for one another is key if we must make it to our promise land.

Before I go further, I must repeat what I've said before; never ever leave your salvation at the mercy of another. Though we have people around us who we think should be praying for us, we must never for this cause cease to be fervent in our prayers for ourselves. But the prayers of others for us and our prayers for others avails much. So they are indispensable.

We are told clearly here to pray ALWAYS for all saints everywhere. So as we learn to pray always and everywhere, one of what we should pray for is all the saints. We must remember one another in prayer. We may be conscious of a particular need or help a fellow brother has, we must pray for such as we would pray for ourselves if we were to be in their condition. And we must pray for the spiritual and physical well being of all saints. We must remember to pray that they should be counted worthy of heaven when ever the time comes. Either they are caught up with our Lord when he comes, or should his coming tarry beyond the span of their life, they should be counted worthy of heaven

when they die. The salvation of a weak or straying one may well be saved by it.

Peter was set for damnation had not the Lord prayed for him. He said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not..." (Luke 22:31 - 32). Jesus was a man of intercession. On the night before going to the cross he of course prayed for himself but the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to John shows us how much he spent praying for us than for himself. In five verses he prayed for himself and the glory of God. From verse six to the end of the chapter he passionately prayed for us all. Herein is love. If Christ so demonstrated his love for us, we too ought to demonstrate such love one to another.

Even people as strong as the apostles still required prayers from the brethren. Paul asked the church at Thessalonians to pray for him when he said, "Brethren, pray for us." (1 Thessalonians 5:25). So we must pray for one another in strength and in weakness, for the weak and for the strong alike. Let us always remember ourselves in passionate and sincere prayer.

Fasting

"And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

(Mark 9:29)

Fasting means staying without food. In the religious sense it means staying without food for a spiritual purpose or religious observance, but fasting can mean just staying without food without any spiritual purpose to it. While Paul was on his way to Rome and they were having a hazardous journey, we read, "And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing." (Acts 27:33). They stayed away from food because they lost appetite given the hazardous situation they found themselves. They did not do it for a religious or spiritual purpose. But that which is beneficial for us is not just staying away from food, which we could call common deliberate starvation or hunger strike. That which is of benefit to us is staying away from food for a spiritual purpose.

How staying away from food translate into spiritual benefit and power, even enough to cast out demons, is something I can't fully understand, but we can be sure it is of immense benefit. Jesus clearly says in the verse above, talking about casting out devils, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." (Mark 9:29).

Fasting was and is also a common practice of all the saints. It was while fasting that the Holy Ghost commissioned Paul and Barnabas for service. It is written, "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

(Acts 13:1 - 3). After ordaining elders in Lystria, Iconium, and Antioch, we read about Paul and Barnabas, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Acts 14:23).

So fasting is of immense spiritual benefit beyond what we can explain. As I have said, one can fast in a way that is just like starving or going on hunger strike, but fasting for a spiritual purpose must be accompanied by prayer. These has a natural way of making us pray more effectively. It makes us sober and more able to reflect on spiritual things. The effect being filled with food has on our being is much. A man that is full is different from himself when he is hungry though he be the same person. Being full makes you merry which King Solomon linked to foolishness, for he says, "the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. (Ecclesiastes 7:4). He also says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." (Ecclesiastes 7:2). So fasting makes you less prone to the foolishness which we are more prone to when we are full. For this reason when you pray while fasting, you prayer shall be better guided by wisdom.

This also means that the perception of an hungry man is clearer and more accurate than that of a man that is full. Why do I come to such conclusion? Jestng is a foolish thing to be doing, but have you ever noticed how people who are full tend to enjoy jestng? But try jestng to an hungry man. You'd only provoke him to anger because he see the jestng as what it is: foolishness. The man that is full on the other hand is blinded by his surfeiting.

A man that with an empty stomach tend to be more spiritual and heaven conscious. The Bible says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." (Galatians 5:17). We see that the flesh and the spirit are contrary one to the other. When one is strong the other tends to be weak. So when the flesh is full the spirit is weakened so to speak. In this respect à Kempis Thomas also wrote, "bridle thine appetite, and thou wilt soon be able to bridle every inclination of the flesh." Not that eating is bad or is a sin, but fasting helps us keep the body under while we seek the face of God in prayer.

A.W. Tozer said that sometimes we may have to come to a point of lack to be able to be spiritually mature. He gave John the Baptist as an example saying that John the Baptist was in the wilderness eating locust and honey. Referring to the lack of variety of food he must have had in the wilderness, he humorously said that John the Baptist ate locust and honey in the morning, honey and locust in the afternoon, and then locust and honey again at night, and that made him spiritual. He says sometimes until we come to that point we may not be spiritually mature. The good old time preacher knew what he was talking about.

Lastly, fasting is an act of chastening the soul. The psalmist wrote, "When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach." (Psalm 69:10). The psalmist chastened his soul with fasting. To chasten is to discipline, and discipline produces good character for it is written, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless

afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11). People that are exercised by chastening develop Christian character and virtue. Every honest Christian knows that in times of adversity their strength grows. Even at times when we may be at ease, we must deliberately let go of food in order to seek the face of God. When adversity comes our way it is a natural environment for the development of Christian character just like a mother hen sitting on her eggs is a natural way of giving eggs adequate heat for the chicks to form. But just as in the absence of a mother hen to sit on the eggs, an incubator, an artificial environment, could be used. So also in the absence of adversity we need to create an artificial environment by fasting to develop worthy Christian character.

Therefore as we prepare for the second coming of our Lord, we must employ fasting. We must seek God's face and discipline ourselves by fasting as often as possible.

Conclusion

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." (Jeremiah 33:3)

We must employ all means to secure our way to heaven. The path to heaven can't be too secure. We must pray always and everywhere. We all, as a body, must make it a habit to intercede for one another. We don't know whose falling away and is in dire need of our prayers. We must also be in the habit of fasting from

time to time. Not just to keep away from food, but to keep away from food while we pray.

As we do these I pray that God shall give us wisdom to understand the importance of these things and more of what shall be of importance to us as we prepare for the great day of our Lord's return. Amen.

***Prayer:** Thank you o Father for the gift of prayer. I pray that you'll grant us the grace to imbibe the practice of prayer. Give us the grace to pray every time and everywhere, to intercede for one another, and to fast regularly. As we do this, please count us worthy to reign with you in your kingdom through all eternity. In Jesus' name I've prayed.*

Amen.

SECTION 5

SUNDRY CAUTIONS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RAPTURE

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

(1 Corinthians 15:52)

Now let us clear something's about Rapture. As we've said before, "we don't need to know when Christ shall come again, we only have to be ready when he does come." For this reason, this may not be too important but it is still good we get to understand the truth about what scriptures says about the timing of the second coming of Christ. It goes a long way to putting us in the right frame of mind as we await the glorious coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We have been continuously told about the rapture as a thing that will happen before the great tribulation and it has been accepted as a factual thing. But the truth of the matter is there is no scriptural basis for this conclusion. Let's brazen up, face our fears, and be factual, the rapture is not going to occur before the great tribulation. This heresy that claims the rapture would occur before the great tribulation is propagated by people who have cowardly tendencies and accepted and cherished by people of like tendencies. Having a wish of not being involved in the great tribulation, they dream of rapture happening before the

great tribulation. By this, they think that all they have to do is just sit down there and so far they don't slap someone, steal, tell a lie, etc, the rapture would just come and take them home and calamity would descend on the world. And all that and all that.

Some so ridiculously say in defence of this stance on rapture, "God will never allow his children to suffer in the great tribulations." Just hear that word, "Never." I laugh at such confidence. Where was God through out history when his children were being brutally killed? Where was he when during all the reign of Queen Marry of England, Christians were being burnt at the stakes on daily basis. Where was he when his faithful servants were betrayed, and killed in the most painful and shameful ways? Where was he at all these times? Or shall we say these people were not Christians and that is why they suffered and died? Of course they were more Christians than we around in this age of apostasy. If these suffered gruesomely, have we become some kind of celestial pets that God would NEVER allow us to go through the tribulations? Are we going to attribute wickedness to God for allowing this? For seeing we call it love that he will NEVER allow his children to go through these things, it must be hate if he allows us to go through them. But God is not wicked. In his love, he said it plainly, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12). For any that wishes to have this view that God will NEVER allow his children to suffer tribulation, I recommend that such an one should read the book titled, "Fox's Book of Martyrs."

Reading the Bible's revelations and prophecies, I find it quite self explanatory. In the book of Daniel in which he recorded the revelations God gave him about the future, you'd find, with the

same revelation, quite clear interpretations of the revelations he had. The revelations of Christ which he gave in the Gospels about the end times too are quite clear, and the revelations in the book of Revelations too is clear to a good extent. What makes understanding these portions of scriptures somewhat hard is the interpretations given it by some Christian writers. Had they left the child of God to himself, he probably wouldn't have a problem understanding them. But they, as foolish guides, lead the child of God in a way that is not right for him so that he cannot find his way.

We all probably have read the famous apocalyptic novel, "Left Behind," but I love the way a writer puts it when he said, "Left Behind was not put in the category of Christian fiction without reason." I wish these fables and fictions about rapture would be disregarded by every child of God. In all our reasonings, we must arrive at conclusions based on scriptural facts.

These misunderstandings about rapture is a major contributor to the sleepiness of the Christian church. The church is way too unready for the challenges ahead because of this lie. For this reason, I hope to present to us the truth about rapture in this chapter.

Rapture would definitely take place. It is completely scriptural and to say it won't happen is to deny a part of the Christian faith, and to deny in part is to deny in whole. But the thing that is wrong with the interpretations of rapture is the position it is placed in the sequence of things that should bring about the end. That misplacement is highly dangerous and has a catastrophic effect on the church.

Jesus, speaking about the end time events, narrated all the terrible things that should come upon the earth which very evidently includes the great tribulations. But after he narrated all these things, he went on to say concerning the event we understand as rapture, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matthew 24:29 - 31). So note that he tells us that after the great tribulations comes the signs of the Son of man, then his appearing, then the rapture. It clearly evident here that rapture would not be before the tribulation but after. Rapture marks the conclusion of all things that shall take place on earth.

To show that all the scripture is in agreement with this, the key text for this chapter goes, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52). That prophecy speaks of rapture. It says at the last trump. But we see that there were seven trumps sounded by angels in the book of Revelations during the great tribulations. But this last one which shall be after all the events of the tribulation is the one that shall sound when rapture shall occur.

Read for yourself what the Bible says will occur when the

seventh trumpet is sounded in Revelations 11:15-19. Note that the twenty four elders said in verse 18, "...thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." The previous trumpets were for torment of the inhabitants of the earth during the great tribulation, but the seventh trumpet would bring about the wrath of God and the time of judgment. This is the last trumpet that apostle Paul spoke of that at its sound we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. This is the rapture.

If you proceed to chapter 12 you may think that it is narrating things that shall occur after the seventh trumpet, but it isn't. This is another revelation entirely. It is not the continuation of the preceding ones, that is why it began with the words, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven..." (Revelation 12:1). The previous revelation was ended and another revelation was about to be narrated.

Luke 17:26 - 29 says, "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. 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." The two examples by which Jesus explains his return, which we understand as rapture, are the story of Noah and the story of Sodom. Note how he says, "the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed

them all." This is the same with the story of Noah. The same day he stepped into the arc, destruction followed. So I want to stress here and now that this whole belief that there is a second chance after rapture is false. There's no tribulation after rapture. Nothing at all shall happen after rapture, no repentance, nothing. The same day Christ comes to take his own home, the same day shall destruction follow. This is all the more reason why we ought to take heed, watch, and pray. Because we know not what time he's coming, and there's no second chance should we be caught napping. So don't fall prey to that heretic belief that after rapture would be the great tribulation, millennial reign, etc. After rapture is judgment. Why wait for a second chance? Why not just go with the arc?

What does this mean? What does it mean if the rapture is not happening before the great tribulation? It means, there is a war to fight and there is a victory to win. It means you're going to war against a monster as brutal as the very Beast. It means, if you prepare yourself now, that you would be accounted worthy to be one of those who shall defeat such a beast. The saints of bygone years have fought a good fight and prevailed, but the good Lord has reserved your own war for you. So, don't just sit there and wait for rapture as an escape from the tribulation. Begin to prepare yourself by means of prayer and intercession, fasting, consistent study of the word of God, meditation, and service to God. Keep asking like Paul asked Christ on the day of his conversion saying, "what wilt thou have me do Lord." (Acts 9:6).

The good soldier who has been faithful to his training and being well trained delights to hear of the approach of the enemy, while the lazy bad soldier gets unhappy at the enemy's approach. The

one for the joy of the victory and glory ahead says, "come on, bring on the battle," but the other bad soldier says, "go away with the battle, with the glory, with the victory, just give me my coffee."

It is time to prepare. It is time, as a good Christian soldier, to cast sloth away. It is time to begin planning and preparing for the end time. It is time to polish your rifle, load your backpack with spiritual ammunitions, get your maps and compass, put on your boots, and singing the victor's song take your position in the ranks of God's end time army with joyous expectation of the victory and glory ahead. Wake up. O wake up child of God.

May God help us all. Amen. Let's pray.

***Prayer:** Dear Father, we see through your word that your plan have made plain to our believing eyes. We see clearly that we have been too cold for what this evil times require. Lord help us to cast sloth away. Help us to wake up to the true spiritual reality in you. Help us to prepare for these evil times ahead. Guide us aright o God of host. In the end, as your revelations also assures us, grant us victory over this evil beast in Jesus' dearest name we pray. Amen.*

MAINTAINING A DUAL FOCUS

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."

(Luke 19:13)

Preparing for the second coming of Christ is not just about making sure that you're ready when he does come, it also boils down to occupying yourself in your duty post while he does tarry. These two things are what maintaining a dual focus entails. Focusing on being ready when he comes without losing focus on being useful while he tarries. I am convinced that no body who loses any of his dual focus shall be counted worthy to go with the Lord when he does come. So we must know that occupying ourselves in duty given by our Lord is an integral part of preparing for his coming. Why, we shall give account of all that we do with his "pounds." It is only those with a good account that shall be counted worthy of being called a good servant and worthy of entering into eternal rest with him.

It is very important to point this out as it is very easy that when treating such a topic, with the sole aim of trying to ensure readers are ready for the coming of our great Lord and King, people tend to think that being rapturable is all that is important for us to strive for. Some would think that they should not be involved in anything down here in this world. However,

we must know that there's a world of thing to do and achieve here before going home.

A friend of mine while handling a Bible study for teenagers in which I was present showed us a video about the mindset of many Christians. The video depicts some Christians as people who are only interested in diving into heaven (as if into a pool) at the end of their life. To them they have no business here. That is a sad realisation. There's nothing in the Bible that points us to such a life. If we had no business in this world, then why are we here? A mistake? He who made us come into this world makes no mistakes. Everything he does is for a purpose. While he tarries we are to occupy till he comes. In this chapter we're going to look at this purpose together.

Holy Rest Is For The Hardworking

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

(Hebrews 4:1)

Heaven is our rest and for this reason it is easy to know that earth is therefore our place of toil and service. For this reason we must, as we wait for the Lord's coming, busy ourselves also in the service of God and humanity. If we don't labour in these, we can be sure that there won't be any rest for us. Why? Rest is for the hardworking. God does not give rest to the lazy.

They that can be counted worthy of heaven are called sons of

God. It is written, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God..." (1 John 3:1 - 2). Why are we called the sons of God if not to exhibit his likeness. And what do we see in God about hard work? God finished his work in six days and rested on the seventh day. This informs us that rest is only right for those who have finished their work and ensured that it is well done, as it is written, "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." (Genesis 1:31). What we see in God our maker is hard work and diligence. Hard work because he did not rest in between the creation process, and diligence because he ensured his work was well done before he rested. Our God is hardworking and diligent. Let us follow his example and be hardworking and diligent too why he tarries.

We are implored to labour for that rest which shall be ours at the coming of the Lord. It is written, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." (Hebrews 4:11). Let us make sure we strive and accomplish that which our Lord has assigned to us. It is also written, "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." (Hebrews 4:10). Let us make sure we finish his work before the time is due when we ought to enter into our rest just like Paul did as he expressed in these words, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7 - 8).

In the parable of talents (Matthew 25:14-30), out of three servants, one was called wicked and was denied entry into the joy of his Lord. He was convinced that his Lord was coming back again the way we are convinced that our Lord is coming back again. In that conviction he did prepare for the coming of his Lord for he kept his money safe and did not throw it away, just the way we too are convinced and thus are preparing for his coming. But unlike the other two, he did not do anything whatsoever for his Lord while he was away. For this reason, the parable ends with these words, "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30).

So God is really interested in what we do while he tarries. There're things about us that we must do for his dear name's sake before we go to our rest. Failure to do this in just idling away waiting for that day when he shall come shall make him say concerning us, "cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." I pray that shall not be so concerning us.

We shall now look at the dual focus we must maintain in preparing for the Lord's return. Both these focus require our labour to accomplish them.

Focus On The Return Of Christ

*"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great
 God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."*

(Titus 2:13)

The focus on the return of Christ is what we have talked in details so far in this book. But they are often two dimensional in the following ways:

- 1. Preparing yourself:** This is getting yourself ready for his return. Taking heed, watching, and praying.

- 2. Preparing Others:** This has to do with interceding for others as well as encouraging others to keep on in the faith in every way possible. These pertains to what you can do for the believers, however what you can do in preparing the unbelievers is to evangelise and seek to convince them to believe and accept the truth of the gospel and be born again.

His Will Be Done "In Earth"

"For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch."

(Mark 13:34)

The parable in the verse above tells us why we're still here. Our dear Lord is he who has gone on a journey to return in due time. While he's away, each of us have been assigned a work to do. Doing this work according to his desire is no less a way of preparing for his coming than taking heed, watching, and

praying. This is because at his coming we shall give account of how well we did the work he has assigned to us. By taking heed, watching, and praying, we ensure that at his coming we enter into heaven with him. Ensuring that we do his work is necessary so that we could give good account worthy of a faithful servant which is also necessary to be granted entry into eternal rest.

How do we know the work he has given us? We know by taking heed to his written word and his speaking voice. By his written word we know usually what is his general command for the household of God. We all know the universal command in the written word that goes, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:19 - 20). We are all a part of that holy calling.

It also is written, "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth." (Luke 11:2). As manifestly expressed in the verse above, we have things to pursue for Jesus' sake and in Jesus' name. Jesus says, when we pray we should first ask for the name of God to be honoured. Then we should ask for his kingdom to come. Also, we should ask for his will to be done in earth as it is in heaven. This should not be understood as a prayer alone but as a paramount pursuit while we live. In a world like that which we find ourselves, this is more than what to busy ourselves with for a life time. The whole of scriptures is full of such passages telling us what we ought to do for his dear name while he tarries.

In other cases, God can give us a specific command as he did to Peter where it is written, "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." (John 21:15 - 17). Jesus here gave Peter his specific command to feed his sheep.

Paul and Barnabas also got a specific command where it is written, "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13:1 - 2). There're also other instances where God gave specific commands to people. If we shall be open and sensitive to him, he shall give us specific assignments.

These things have to do more with Christian service to God which I shall talk on more holistically in another book focused on that subject, but it is good for us to be clear on this now. This dual focus also means working to be able to make a good and honest living (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). We must not in focusing on things above and in trying to be prepared for his coming and forget that we have assignments to complete here on earth. We

must maintain a dual focus both on his coming and on his assignment for us here on earth in a complementary way. May God help us in Jesus' name. Amen.

***Prayer:** O Lord and God, deliver us from losing focus of our assignments here on earth while your coming tarry. Help us to always maintain a dual focus above and around. Count us worthy of reigning with you when you come in Jesus' name. Amen.*

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

"Remember Lot's wife."

(Luke 17:32)

The story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is well known, and this calling of our Lord to remember the wife of Lot is of great importance to us especially today. It points out to us the need to war against emotionalism and sentimentalism. Both emotions and sentiments are diametrically opposed to reason. And reason is one of the key things that ought to guide a Christian after the Bible which of course is the final authority. That these two things are so opposed to reason, as important as it is to we Christians, shows how dangerous they are should we allow them to influence us.

Now, about Lot's wife. Many things has been unfairly and baselessly said about that woman in respect to her looking back when the commandment was clearly not to look back. Some say she loved the sinful life of Sodom and Gomorrah, and for this love she looked back. Others say she had a lot of wealth that she had left behind in the rush, and for this reason she looked back. Other things are said about the woman which are both unfair and baseless.

All that the Bible says about her is this, "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." (Genesis 19:26). There was no explanation as to why she did so. It may have been simple curiosity, or anything else. All those

assumptions were probably made to form a beautiful sermon. That practice of twisting and turning scriptures and adding spices to it to make a sermon sweet must stop if we are to be a people of proper reason and sound minds.

From the Book of Jasher we can however get a convincing reason why she looked back and derive evidence of it from scriptures. Before I go on, let me endeavour to explain why The Book Of Jasher is a good reference in trying to understand the things that transpired from Genesis to the death of Joshua. It is simply because the Bible itself made reference to it in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18. So I am not by any means recommending to us other books which are even likely demonic that claims to be about early Bible times or to be written by Moses. Let us stay away from such, but The Book of Jasher is credible. So, it is written in the book of Jasher this way:

“...and Ado the wife of Lot looked back to see the destruction of the cities, for her compassion was moved on account of her daughters who remained in Sodom, for they did not go with her. And when she looked back she became a pillar of salt, and it is yet in that place unto this day.” So it was compassion for her daughters that made her look back and not all the false and baseless reasons people have been giving for the poor woman's actions.

We can now see a confirmation of this in the Bible. We understand in the Bible that when the angels brought the news of the plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to Lot, it says:

"And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast

in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. 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. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." (Genesis 19:12 - 15).

We see here that the husbands of the daughters of Lot who were married thought he was joking, for this reason they ignored and refused to go with him. The angels in the morning hastened him and said he should take the two that were with him and leave. So it was for the sake of the compassion Lot's wife had for those other of her daughters who were left behind that she looked back. While the looking back was sinful and the judgement just, such compassion that led to the sin was natural and not sinful as people have been attributing all manner of evil to the reason she looked back. So why did Jesus point us to this?

In the light of this knowledge, the statement of Jesus in Luke 17:32 takes an entirely different meaning. This new and true meaning of Jesus' statement is very important for us as we prepare for the second coming of our dear Lord and Saviour. His statement is a direct call for us to be cautious of sentimentalism and emotionalism.

Just as Lot's wife sinned on account of her compassions and emotions, many today, on the basis of emotions and sentiments, disobey God's direct command. Lot's wife was very justifiable

compared to the nonsense emotionalists and sentimentalists we have today. She had a reason to be emotional and be moved by her compassion for it was the thought of her very daughters that made her look back, but today people get emotional over nothing and disobey God's command on account of those emotions.

People hardly try to convince one another in anything at all without trying to stir the emotions of those they're trying to convince. And on the basis of nonsense emotions draw stupid conclusions. As I've said before that emotionalism and sentimentalism are diametrically opposed to reason. Using them in trying to arrive at logical conclusions is futile. It is completely irrational to appeal, in the course of discussions, to sentiments instead of reason. It is this blunder of attributing so much to emotions and sentiments that many stupid arguments and ways of life seem justifiable. For once the emotions are stirred, the brain switches entirely off or stops working partially.

I once heard a sermon in which the preacher was clearly trying to show how tenderhearted he was. The preacher spoke of a man who's brother wanted to travel, so while he was away, he told his wife to stay with this man (for reasons I'm yet to understand). In the course of time, this man started sleeping with his brother's wife and ended up impregnating her. He knew he couldn't hide his folly any more, so he went secretly to our tenderhearted preacher man and told him all that he did. The man who impregnated his brother's wife said, he doesn't want to open up to the church and he's leaving the church because if he opened up they'd expose him to the shame of rebuking him openly, and suspend him from fellowship. He said he couldn't stand that so he said he was going to his tribal chiefs who were into diabolical practices to resolve the matter, for this would not expose him to

shame. So our "tender hearted" preacher told us that he was confused about what to do. He said he didn't want the man to go to Hell. He said that rather than allowing the man go to his tribal chiefs and get involved in diabolic practices, he had to beg the man not to go, but to return to the church and that he would not be openly rebuked, neither would he be suspended. He'd just continue with life as if nothing happened. Does anyone realise how very stupid this is? As if that were not enough, he tried to liken his actions to that of Jesus going after Peter to restore him after he had denied him thrice.

When I heard his nonsense sermon, I laughed at such a glorious show of sentimental folly. Did not the Bible clearly command us saying, "Them that sin rebuke BEFORE ALL, that others also may fear." (1 Timothy 5:20). Did Paul not in the fifth chapter of 1st Corinthians, with the leading of the Spirit, ask the Corinthian church to expell the man that acted with a wickedness as grievous as this, asking them to hand him over to the very Devil? So what is so great to hand over such a man to Satan whether it be through his going to his tribal chiefs or not. Discipline is an integral part of the church system and is a direct command from God. But this man, on the basis of the emotions and sentiments he tried stirring in the hearts of his hearers, sought to justify his disobedience, refusing to rebuke such wickedness openly and suspending such a wicked fellow from the fellowship. Arrant nonsense.

Discipline by suspension from fellowship is very scriptural. How it should be done and for what it should be done would be another days topic, but people wrestle against it, bringing up how it is incompatible with emotions and sentiments. Of course they won't use these words, but they would cover it up with

words such as; love, compassion, etc. (misdefining them to mean sentiments and foolish emotions). One person, when talking about suspension from fellowship, asked his hearers, "can love act that way?" Meaning can love lead someone to be suspended from fellowship? Of course the truth is that love corrects even by discipline. Jesus says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." (Revelation 3:19). Solomon says also, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Proverbs 13:24). From here we understand that discipline is an expression of love and failure to discipline when required is an expression of hate. But sentimentalism which he's secretly referring to can't act that way because it is foolish. Sentimentalism and emotionalism can't discipline even when required. Many, with this weird style of argument, seek to convince people that the church ought not to suspend people at all. In other cases, people also on the basis of false compassion argue that the church should allow people to divorce and remarry on account of compassion. These and many others do they foolishly put forward having nothing to appeal to but emotions. Very sad.

Other preachers defend the practice of living on the gospel a justifiable one by appealing to conscience. In Nigeria, where I'm from, many started realising the falsehood in tithe practices in the Christian church and began to challenge it. I listened to one fool of a pastor defend the tithe doctrine and all he did was to try to stir up people's emotions. He talked about how pastors used to suffer in the past. With that he stirred sympathy. Then he talked about a host of other things stirring up anger and all manner of bad emotions without saying anything reasonable. Yet he convinced his audience with these alone. Pastors do these a lot. A preacher once preaching to his audience narrated a horrible

story and was deliberately just stirring up emotions. Sometimes he'd get close to bursting in tears, at other times he'd moving his lips as if trying to speak but would say nothing as if he couldn't find words to get people to understand what he was saying or as if he was overcome with emotions. And the person watching it was so moved by all the emotional stories and gestures pointing out each gesture to me and on that basis drank in all the blunder the preacher was pouring out.

Whenever this happens, whenever people are so keen on stirring up emotions, they are most likely not going to say anything truthful. This is so for two reasons. Either they are craftily seeking to present erroneous beliefs but know it would not be acceptable to the rational and sober mind and thus use this scheme to put their point through, or they themselves came to the erroneous belief on account of their silly emotions. The man that will be ready for the second coming of the Lord must not be such a person that allows emotions to sweep him off his feet.

On a lighter note, One day while commuting, a woman sat in the sit in front of me, as we drove along, she saw someone who just alighted from another vehicle having 500 Naira and was looking for a change of 100 Naira to pay his fare. Just for this, she became so emotional, you needed to see how emotional she became. She started breathing heavily almost sobbing just because she saw someone looking for change. She quickly pleaded with the driver to stop the vehicle, and calling the man over, she gave him the change he needed and we drove off. The driver asked her, "I hope you have the change to pay me?" She responded, "don't worry, let's go." When she got to her destination she brought out 500 Naira to pay a fare of 100 Naira. We were shocked at this woman. The driver started fuming

because he had no change for her and she kept us there a long while searching her bag in vain for change. She saw someone in need of change and must have thought to herself that she ought to help, but ended up being very unfair to her driver for whom she ought to have kept her change. She was also unfair to us for keeping us waiting while they went about looking for change. So emotions, when we allow it ride us, can make us be unfair, even wicked, in the very attempt of being kind.

It is on the basis of emotionalism and sentimentalism that the diabolical movement of feminism has gained so much ground. I tried to listen to the arguments of feminists, and all they do is make a beeline for your emotions trying to switch off your brain. Once they succeed, they'd start pouring out all their silly points. They'd first of all tell you of how some men were brutal to their wives and use this as a basis of their arguments. This way they stir your sympathy and anger. Now feminism does not seem bad at surface level, but it presents gender equality to us which is completely alien to scriptures. There is no hint of gender equality both in the New and Old Testaments. Of course neither is there any hint that womankind should be intimidated or battered, or denying them what should be of benefit to them, but gender equality is purely antithetical to scriptures, and therefore clearly of the Devil. They merely hide behind the good purpose of fighting for the good and welfare of womankind to bring about a world of evil.

Even if gender equality should exist in the world created by God contrary to the standards of her creator, it is sad enough, but sadder is the fact that it is fast establishing itself in his very church. People want women to act in every capacity a man can act. The Bible clearly forbids a woman from speaking in the

church, that is they shouldn't even ask questions (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). But on the basis of the emotionalism and sentimentalism of feminism, they're being allowed to preach and teach and act in whatever capacity a man can. The stance of scriptures on the matter would therefore be seen as injustice, unfairness, and prejudice against womankind. But take a wholistic view of the whole matter of feminism, look at its origin which is that women were being battered. At this point and with their detailed narration a fool's brain would be switched off in sympathy and "holy anger". Because of this battery and having successfully switched off the brain, they can now put forward the foolish argument that the solution is to make her equal to a man. After that (still with the brain switched off) a long chain of argument ensues. At the tail end of the nonsense process, the conclusion would be that women should be allowed to preach and speak in the church. So the summary is this, looking at it from the beginning, women were battered in their homes, for this reason, they should preach in the churches of Christ against his command. Isn't that silly? On the basis of silly emotions and sentiments that, because of stories of men beating their wives, we no longer should keep the commandment of God that forbids a woman from speaking in his church, not even to ask questions. Very silly.

I once talked to someone about this issue of women speaking in the church, and he turned his emotional side on me, asking me, "how would you feel if you were the one that was denied from speaking in the church? Would you be happy?" I was puzzled at such a question. So is the matter of obedience to God now about how we feel and not what is written? This is just like in a case of two people chattering while a preacher is preaching and distracting everybody else, and an usher comes to them and

saying, "shhh, stop talking." Then they turn to the usher and ask him, "how would you feel if you were the one that was denied from speaking while the preacher is preaching? Would you be happy? He's talking, even loudly, why shouldn't we talk also?" I'm sure he'd be puzzled and dumbfounded. Same way I get so puzzled by the way people reason on these matters.

God demands many things from me and other men too, how do we feel? He says that we mustn't lie even for advantage, how do I feel when I hear that? He said I shouldn't steal even if I'm sure I won't get caught. How do I feel about that? He asked me not to fornicate even when it hurts no one, how does that make me feel? Of course it is obvious that when God commands, what you feel is insignificant. We are not a law to ourselves but God is the giver of the commands we obey if we truly love Jesus. Does our feelings change his commands? Does not the heart that love him gladly obey it? Does such a heart seek to change his commands. Should not a Christian woman gladly obey the command to not speak? Should not a sensible man encourage them to do so? But we find sentimentalists pouring out vain arguments that makes the commandments of God, as good as they are, seem unfair or prejudicial to womankind.

But let us step out of the world of emotionalists and think in a rational way, would such people who have been so rebuked to keep quiet while the preacher is preaching not feel ashamed and keep quiet seeing that they were doing what ought not to be done or inappropriate for the time and place they found themselves? So also, should a woman not feel ashamed to speak in the church? Should they not on that account keep quiet? For indeed the Bible clearly states that it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). But all these are ignored

by people who allow their emotions ride them about like mules.

I once read a story of some little children in a church of a long time ago. They had competitions in the church from time to time, but among them was this orphan. The person who always acted as a judge in the competition was a big time emotionalist. No matter how poorly this orphan did she always won. With a sob he'd say to himself something like, "and she's an orphan." And for that reason he would declare her winner. This unfair judgment made all the other kids very angry. The same way emotionalists let their emotions to move them to make choices that gets God very angry.

The problem is that many people wilfully choose emotions and sentiments over scriptures because while emotions and sentiments are soft and tender, and able to accomodate and excuse all our innate avarice and fleshly lusts, the scriptures is hammer and fire (Jeremiah 23:29), unable to tolerate or excuse such. So they hypocritically lean towards emotions so as not to appear evil as they truly are.

Jesus was not an emotionalists nor was he a sentimentalist. You may see him being moved with compassion (Mark 6:32), you may see him weeping at Lazarus' grave (John 11:35), you may see him having compassion on the widow whose only son was dead, (Luke 7:12-13), and many other cases in which he was moved with compassion, but they all led him to do God's will and not to do otherwise. He had compassion, but it was given its rightful place as mere feelings and not as to allow it direct him to do what is contrary to God's will. God must be ultimate in all things.

An emotionalist of Jesus' time, wanting to be his disciple, came to him with all that emotion and said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." (Matthew 8:21). An emotionalist would probably have asked the man whether or not he were so dumb to come ask him first of all before going to bury his own father with special emphasis on "HIS OWN." Some may call him closer to interrogate him if he really knew who a father was. They could ask him, "do you know that your father was responsible for you being in this world? Do you know that he laboured sometimes beyond his capacity to be able to afford a good living for you? Do you know that your father was a shield around you while you grew up? Do you know he died for you? Em, sorry, I meant paid your school fees? Do you know? Do you know? Do you know? And are you first asking me before you'd go bury such a person?" Then with sobs of anguish at such disregard for emotions and sentiments, he'd shed a tear or two, one through his eye and the other through his nostril. And all that and all that. They may not go that far in ridiculousness but emotionalists make emphasis as senseless as what I portray here. But hear Jesus' response lest you mistake him for an emotionalist, "Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." (Matthew 8:22). Jesus was all about doing the will of God, and his compassion could never stand in the way. Jesus knew it was the father's will that men follow him in every sense of the word "follow," and the death of a man could not lead him to advise anything contrary to that. Jesus was a compassionate person, but never was he an emotionalist or sentimentalist. So let us be clear on that.

Are you compassionate? Let it move you to preach the Gospel to the dying world. Are you compassionate? Let it move you to give selflessly to the needy. Are you compassionate? Let it move you to fulfil the law of love especially to the household of faith. These

are the ways Christian compassion ought to move us. It should move us inline with God's will and not against it. Never should we disobey God's command and seek to justify our disobedience on the basis of sentiments and emotions. In all things, Jesus is our perfect example. Let us live like him.

This may seem light but it is also worth noting. In my part of the world, people engage themselves so much partying in festivities, whether they're marriages, wedding anniversaries, etc. and even burials. These things are good but the work of the Lord requires urgency. The Bible clearly tells us that the times are evil. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:16). This is especially true of our time above all other times because there's so much to be done for God seeing the immense privileges technological advancement has brought us. Just look at the crowd we could reach through social media. Ought we not to spend our time preparing impactful messages that could change these crowd? Just visit Project Gutenberg website, for example, and see millions of useful books that are out there for free. Ought we not to withdraw ourselves from these mundane things to afford ourselves more time to study? Look at the increasing depravity of the societies all round the world. Ought we not suppose to withdraw ourselves to prayer of faith and back up that prayer of faith with the good works of Christian activism (which of course has nothing to do with resisting authorities or being violent)? Look at the church and the poor state she is in. Ought we not by prayer and persistent good works seek for change and reformation that would bring revival to us? The list of the things that require our time goes on.

Even marriage, as important as it is, is permitted on the basis of our weaknesses only. Paul advised that where possible it is

better to be single. This he said because of the shortness of time we have. How much less important should we see festivities. We ought not to be spending our time on things of little importance while there's a raging fire calling for our attention. In warning about the end times, Jesus was particular about festivities when he said, "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:26 - 27). Let us not displease God forsaking his work to please men by attending all their occasions.

These things we ought to do for God because this is what his will is for us at the present time. How shall we then, take of our time which belongs to God and spend it on things that are of little benefit to anyone, all in the name of showing love to celebrants and not wanting them to feel bad that you absented yourself from their occasion?

Some justify their inordinate love for festivities by saying that God said we should rejoice with those that rejoice (Romans 12:15). But you see, rejoicing with someone is quite different from going to their occasion to eat rice, drink malt, dance, or show everyone how white your teeth is. It is good to rejoice with those who rejoice, but we must be thrift with our time. We must always keep in mind that absenting yourself from such occasions is not an expression of hate or anger at the joy of those who are rejoicing, neither is your attendance an expression of your happiness at their joy. By the way suicide bombers also attend the events they blow up. Rejoicing with those that rejoice is all about inward happiness that people are doing well and have the cause to rejoice. This we ought to express in appropriate ways

including sending loving congratulatory text messages of best wishes via any convenient medium. As Christians, we must not allow our sentiments to make us to waste our time in things that don't profit the kingdom of God. We must therefore limit our festivities and unnecessary activities and devote our time to God.

Now, as our Lord asked us to remember Lot's wife who allowed compassion for her daughters lead her to sin against God's direct command. We would do well to bring to sober reflection the fact that though she was far better and justifiable compared to the silly emotionalists of our time, she got the judgment of God in all its severity. So also, every man, woman, boy, or girl, that on the basis of emotions or sentiments sin against God with the hope of justifying it on this account instead of repenting would get the judgment of God in all its severity. All these preachers who further compromise, all these women who mount pulpits to talk, pray, or preach, and do all the things God forbids them from doing, shall all get the judgment of God in all its severity. I therefore plead that we repent of these evils, push emotions and sentiments out of our faculty and allow only scriptures, the Holy Ghost, and reason to guide us.

May God help us all by his grace. Amen.

***Prayer:** Dear Jesus. Help us to be like you in every way. Help us not to be emotional and sentimental in our reasoning but trust in your word and the Holy Spirit's leading alone to guide us in the way we should act. Help us not to allow the mundane and unimportant things of this world to distract us from being prepared for your coming. Help us dear Lord. In Jesus' name have I prayed. Amen.*

SECTION 6

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

(Revelation 3:11)

As we come to the end of this book, let us take a look at all that we've seen from the beginning.

- We saw that the time of his coming is sooner now than ever.
- We don't need to know the time of his coming, we just have to be ready when he does come.
- Being ready for his coming requires us to simply take heed, watch, and pray.
- We must take heed to the written and speaking word of God, as well as to the voice of our conscience.
- We must watch against ourselves, the spirit of the Antichrist, the fear of contempt, and the love of praise.
- Like the command to take heed and to watch, prayer is also a command, therefore, failure to pray is a sin.
- We must pray everywhere and every time. We must intercede for others and fast as often as possible.
- It is of advantage for us to know the right sequence of end time events.
- Preparing for the second coming of Christ is about being ready when he does come as much as it is about having a good account of how your time here on earth was spent. For this reason we must maintain a dual focus. One on

being ready when he comes, the other on being useful while he tarries.

- Remember Lot's Wife.

That shall be pretty much it. Remember he is coming soon. May God grant us the grace to counted worthy to go with him when he does come in Jesus name. Amen.

Let's sing the hymn "He's Coming Soon," by Thoro Harris (1874–1955):

In these, the closing days of time,
 What joy the glorious hope affords,
 That soon—O wondrous truth sublime!
 He shall reign, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Chorus

*He's coming soon, He's coming soon;
 With joy we welcome His returning;
 It may be morn, it may be night or noon—
 We know He's coming soon.*

The signs around—in earth and air,
 Or painted on the starlit sky,
 God's faithful witnesses—declare
 That the coming of the Savior draweth nigh.

Chorus

The dead in Christ who 'neath us lie,
 In countless numbers, all shall rise
 When through the portals of the sky

He shall come to prepare our paradise.

Chorus

And we, who living, yet remain,
Caught up, shall meet our faithful Lord;
This hope we cherish not in vain,
But we comfort one another by this word.

Chorus

Prayer: Thank you O Holy Father for bringing us to the conclusion of this book. May the truth of your word it presents never depart from our hearts but serve as a constant reminder of your coming and how to prepare till we see thy blessed face above. Thank you O Father for I believe and know that you shall do this. In Jesus' mighty name I pray.
Amen.
