

How To Make Heaven: Eliminating Caricature, Making The Path Straight

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Introduction

Every right thinking man on planet earth is bothered about two things: How to live rightly on earth and where he would be after death. Some tend to live their lives cautiously because they are scared of the law of Karma. Some through insight into the doctrines of religions, they aspire to keep some religious laws, including moral laws, though with great difficulties.

But, Apostle Paul, during his trial when brought before Governor Felix and was accused of being troublemaker, and ringleader of the Nazarene sect who stirred up riots among the Jews all over the world, in his defense said, “I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today” (Acts 24:14-16,21).

It is crystal clear that Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead, and is alive today. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He came to the world to redeem mankind back to God, and spelt out, without mincing words to everyone who cares to listen, that only he can take us back to His Father in heaven. For three and half years, he gladly and painfully explained to us how we can enter the kingdom of God. He told us about the narrow gate, the mystery of the kingdom and its benefits, including the how, where, when, who, and what concerning the kingdom of heaven. I mean he was explicit.

Many Bible scholars have spoken on the subject of making heaven in various perspectives, including faith, holiness, righteousness, and what have you. But there is a critical area which calls for caution – True Repentance. True repentance is wrapped up in Biblical justice - God’s partial justice as against the world kind of justice, show of Mercy, Faithfulness (walking humbly with God), Tithing, Giving, and Living beyond yourself (Mic 6:8, Mal 3: 8, Isa 58:7, Matt 23:23).

These are the attributes that made Jesus to extend his mission to the Gentile nation despite the limit of his vision to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, because God is no respecter of persons.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd (John 10:16).

In addition, heaven bound people need concerned themselves with pure worship, what the Lord require from them or the weightier matters.

It takes more than faith in God through Jesus Christ to go to heaven, since that only give us leverage with demon (James 2:19). Yes, staying in the born again status quo is not it. That will only limit you to seeing the kingdom of heaven but having no access to it. A Christian having false faith will not make heaven unless his faith climbs higher to what is known as real faith or genuine faith. Come to think of it, Christ brought you out of wickedness: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life when you became born again, and you still tend to go back to your vomit. Christ the hope of glory is not in such life.

John the Baptist told his onlookers that to flee from the wrath to come, they must bear *fruits worthy of repentance* – and he told them straightaway what he meant and what they needed to do (Luke 3:7-8). Jesus expounded on this in Matthew chapter twenty – five.

The critical phrase or phenomenon on the subject: “How to make heaven” is ‘bearing fruits worthy of repentance’ which is a challenge to many ‘born again’ Christians world-wide.

This is what this timely book is divinely orchestrated to unravel and impart into your life, so that you will not be cast away on that final day when:

The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, sit upon the throne of his glory, gathered all nations and shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.

Beloved, this is a time to count yourself lucky (Ps 32:1 MSG), and be happy — getting a fresh start with God on your journey to making heaven, as your slate is wiped clean.

With strict adherence to the teachings in this book, I see Christ say unto you on that final day: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34), Amen.

Chapter 1: The Precious Kingdom

The kingdom of God means the same thing as the kingdom of heaven. It refers to God's rule of grace in the world, a future period foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament and identified by Jesus as beginning with His public ministry. The kingdom of God is the experience of blessedness, like that of the Garden of Eden, where evil is fully overcome and where those who live in the kingdom know only happiness, peace, and joy.

What Is Heaven?

Heaven is the dwelling place of God (Gen 28:17; Rev 12:7-8). It is the source of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 10). Because of the work of Christ on the Cross, heaven is, in part, present with believers on earth as they obey God's commands (John 14:2,23). At the end of time a new heaven will be created to surround the new earth. This new heaven will be the place of God's perfect presence (Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1). Then there will be a literal fulfillment of heaven on earth.

Perfect Realization of The Kingdom

John the Baptist astonished his hearers when he announced that this expected and hoped-for kingdom was "at hand" in the person of Jesus (Matt 3:2). Jesus repeated this message, but He went even further by announcing clearly that the kingdom was already present in His ministry. Jesus was the full embodiment of the kingdom.

Participation in the kingdom of heaven requires a life devoted to righteousness, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). Jesus also confirmed the commencement of the kingdom of heaven on earth when he read a passage from Isaiah 61 about the coming messianic age and then made the astonishing announcement, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" All that Jesus did is related to this claim that the kingdom of God has dawn through His ministry. His healings were manifestations of the presence of the kingdom.

Although the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John focus on the present aspect of the kingdom of God, it is also clear that the kingdom will be realized perfectly only at the second coming. The kingdom of heaven was physically present in the deeds and words of Jesus. The future kingdom will bring the present age to an end and usher in the perfect age promised in the prophets. The present kingdom is both anticipation and a guarantee of this future bliss. Apostle Paul identified the kingdom of God as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

Some interpreters of the Bible have described the phrase kingdom of God as a more comprehensive term referring to both heaven and earth. Likewise, they believe kingdom of God is a more restricted term referring to God's rule on earth, especially in relation to the nation of Israel. In this view Jesus offered the literal kingdom of heaven to Israel, but the Jews refused to accept it. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)

Wisdom To Enter The Kingdom

Jesus told his listeners that, “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”(Matt 18:2-3). The kingdom is meant for those who are “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3), and anyone ready to receive it like a little child (Mark 10:15). To be a partaker of the kingdom, you must manifest the attitude of a little child.

What are the peculiar features of a child? Humility is generally found in children. A child will hardly argue with his father. When a child sees a thing, and he has a mental picture of it, he tells it to his father or mother. Once his father or mother tells the child that what he saw was not what he taught it really is, the child will be gullible enough to admit what his parent said without much debate or argument. It takes a degree of foolishness for an unbeliever to become a born again child of God. A person who is faulty in his thinking would find it difficult to believe the story of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the cause he stood for. He will simply throw it away like the wave of the hand and continue to indulge in acts inimical to making heaven. He will prefer to take the Gospel as a cork and bull story. It takes heavenly, not demonic wisdom to submit totally to the things of God and be partaker of His kingdom. A man that is satanically endowed with earthly wisdom will find it fool hardy to navigate himself into the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, I tell you, children are easy to lead. They have teachable spirit likened to that of Apollos, and the Eunuch that was taught and baptized by Philip. Children are known for their straight -forwardness. They are neither cunning nor skimmers. When a father asks a child to lie to an approaching creditor that he is not at home, and immediately went into hiding, as soon as the creditor gets to where the little child is and ask of his father, the little child will respond as follows, “My father said I should tell you that he is not at home” Curiously too, why delivering the message, the child will be looking in the direction of the father’s hide-out, and even go to the extent of exposing the father to the creditor. This is a show of spirit that detests lying and betrayal. Children also have what I call open honesty.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt 19:14). I see those encountering breakdowns in life – the handicaps, the poor, the sick, and the oppressed in general, as those referred to as children here. These are people who cannot speak for themselves, who the rich in the society would snub because they seem to have no attractive personality by world standard. Ironically these people are treasured by their creator. They are those who Jesus described as having the need of a Physician (Mk 2:17). In Matt 11:5-6, Jesus said the disciples of John the Baptist should tell their master in prison that “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them”. You see, the gospel is the reason for the common man.

The essence of the kingdom of God in the life of men is total conversion of breakdowns to breakthroughs. The kingdom of God expresses itself clearly when those who are held captive by Satan regain their freedom, and are on the path of fulfilling their own part of God’s purposes on earth. Jesus had this in mind when he told his disciples that “Whatever city you enter, heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'” (Luke 10:8-10).

“The kingdom of God has come near to you” means that when you are healed; go about doing your divine task of affecting the lives of others. Meaning it is your turn to shine for the kingdom. So the kingdom of God is a continual thing. You are blessed to be a blessing, so God wants you to pass to others His kingdom as soon as you are visited. What do I refer to as His kingdom here?

Doing good. Doing good is the earthly form of God's kingdom that came into existence since the start of Jesus earthly ministry. What good? Setting the oppressed free in any capacity God has endowed you with from your bowels of compassion. Remember what Peter said of Jesus in the book of Acts: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

When you experience the Lord's goodness, breakdowns are lifted in your life, then recompense God by doing good to others. Jesus said "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Love is the medium for expressing the kingdom of God on earth; therefore the kingdom of God is expected to be demonstrated in your life by your move of compassion. The results of such compassion should include forgiveness, teaching, deliverance, prayer intercession, feeding, healing, and helping the wounded. God's kingdom is all about seeing the works of God made manifest in the life of anyone you come across or making somebody to see the glory of God through you. In the book of John, chapter nine, a gentleman that was born blind from her mother's womb was healed when the works of God was made manifest in his life. The devil kept him bound for so long by the permissive will of his Creator, but his deliverance came in a jiffy through the Messiah.

The kingdom of God in the present dispensation demands that people passing through any form of ordeal get the works of God manifested in their life at an appointed time within their life, by kingdom men and seekers of the kingdom. This should happen when God orders sufferer's step to such individuals that God has beforehand ordained to let go their burden. Kingdom men should refrain from finding fault with the afflicted. God is not there, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). All that God wants you to do is to quickly release kingdom grace that will get the poor person out of his tribulation (John 9:3).

Yes, you may not be a healing evangelist, but you can give referrals as acted Naaman's housemaid who laid aside all her grievances as slave, and connected him to the healing prophet. You see, when you talk about God and His kingdom, it is a different ball game altogether when viewed without sentiment and in the right perspective. God is not interested in the medium used by the demons of affliction, as some ministers will perplex their victims with, generating wrong motives of letting their clients develop hatred for their relations and acquaintances, which could in turn lead them to hell. Kingdom business is all about doing good even to your merciless enemies and healing all that are oppressed by the chief oppressor – Satan.

There is something the spirit of God deposited in my spirit long ago and I feel it is pertinent to share with you right now. You see, deliverance is not the only or the most paramount outcome of compassion as some made people to feel. The six other results of compassion are healing, forgiveness, feeding, prayer intercession, teaching and helping the wounded.

If a deliverance minister or a 'prophet' tells you that your mother or one of your relations is behind your problem, then, you suddenly hate such relation, and he leads you in fire prayer, and that your mother or relation dies, and you feel you are now a victor; I tell you, you've done yourself no good but rather increased your torment, and you have no part in God's kingdom. Why do I say this? I see every human being that the demon called 'witch' reside in his life as innocent in the eyes of God. Why? This is because the demon is often deposited in such life when he was just a little child, and had no power of his own to resist the incoming demon, which

is often violent. Now this wonderful person, you called a relation of yours grew into adulthood, then the witch now held him captive, dominated his life and perpetrated evil using him as carrier, and you are blaming him rather than Satan. This is erroneous. Peter, the convener of the first gathering of believers, made it clear, that it is Satan that afflict people not human beings (Acts 10:38), so let's deal with the devil instead and not that divine destiny carrying person who was created in the image of God. Scripture says that person you are causing his existence is fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, I agree with you, she allegedly carries the demon behind your problem, but he is not the personality behind your problem as your earthly 'god' must have told you.

And let me tell you again, that testimony you gave before the church congregation, asking them to join you to thank God for the death of that witch troubling your life, is an unaccepted offering before God. It is worst than the offering of Cain. I assure you; such act will lead you to hell if you die without repentance, and denounce such evil testimony. Maybe you've not been told that spirits don't die. Do they? Now hear this revelation. When that your so called family witch is about to give up the ghost, the legions of demons troubling your life through her will not enter the grave with him, instead, they will depart from that carcass, look for another living body who may or may not be part of your family chain, and continue to torment your life, and this time, their instructor – Satan will be telling them: harder! harder!! harder!!!. So you need to think right to be part of God's awesome kingdom.

The kingdom of God on earth is not a sectional thing. That was why the people couldn't comprehend Jesus romance with sinners. Unknown to those around him, the spirit of God was echoing in his spirit Ps 145:9: "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works".

The Bible is a progressive book. It is also a book that is divinely packaged to take the wise from crawling stage to the running stage. The running stage has to do with running your unique life vision to make heaven. Maybe the scripture "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Ex 22:18) is your strength. You missed it. This scripture was ousted long ago by Jesus during his earthly visit two thousand years ago, for the fulfillment of the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17). Jesus in resonance with the kingdom taught that you should love even your enemy. You may not like that person: what he does or approve of his actions, however, Christ want you to accept him, love him and win him over to him.

It takes love, not hatred to win a person to Christ. I tell you, the day Holy Spirit convicts a herbalist of his evil works, that same day, that herbalist will repent from his evil deeds, and take up his cross and follow Christ. So, let the kingdom of God be deep rooted in you. For it is wrapped up in the good you do to Christ – I mean your neighbors, those you meet as you go out and come in daily by the mercies of God. T.L Osborn said when he held a crusade in Nigeria, he never asked worshippers of vain gods to bring their cultic materials to the crusade ground. He said as the people heard him preached the Gospel, Holy Spirit arrested them and they went on their own accord to their respective homes and shrines, and brought all the garbage therein to the crusade ground, and surrendered their lives to Christ. The doing word in God's kingdom is *love in totality*, "for love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

How can you raise a horsewhip and beckon on a child that he should come? Even if he is your child he would not come to you until you put down that offensive rod. He would just stand akimbo and be at alert to run incase you venture to get up from your seat. Kingdom seekers must

desist from such practice but be receptive to sinners; needless to say they themselves are not righteous but for self-righteousness claim – which is a sin on its own.

Kingdom Men Don't Die

Now hear this, Witch only succeed in killing those who have not discovered their destiny. I mean those who are confused about life, and are influenced by world principle rather than God's. A confused person is one who is yet to receive vision about his divine assignment: what God made him to do. Many people felt hunted by death because they are not on the part of their divine destiny. Men of vision don't die prematurely except the Lord decides to call them to Himself so as to save them from the evil to come, which may take them out of His faith. They never wax old. They have unusual strength like that of Caleb. God's word says resist the devil, he will flee from you. Say to the demon troubling your life, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!" (Zech 4:7). If Zerubbabel could not be stopped by the accuser of the brethren in his days, incapacitated by powers or might, then you too cannot be stopped. So only you can stop yourself in the kingdom race, because the Spirit of God is available for you to the fullest.

When death came in the person of Ishmael the wizard to snatch away the life of eighty persons of the people of Judah who were held captive by the Babylonians, ten persons out of the eighty told death, to hell with your stings! You missed it! we are too loaded to die; we are not idle as you thought, we have located our niche and best-fit in life, we are presently at our place of divine assignment, in short, we are doing what God designed us to do - affecting our generation, so, if you kill us, no rightful replacement as no one else can dress and keep our unique gardens. To your tent o death! Then the spirit of death whispered to Ishmael, "spare the lives of these ten, but kill the remaining seventy" And Ishmael did exactly that (Jer 41:4-9).

By recapitulation, I remembered sometime in 1995 in Warri Nigeria, one night I was attacked by four gang of armed robbers. One of them aimed his double-barrel gun at my heart, as he used the other hand to check the content of the bag I was carrying. After the check, the commander of the gang who was sitting inside their vehicle roared like a devouring lion and said, "Leave him, take the touch". Immediately, the robber snatched the touch –light I was holding with questionable force and they drove off. Minutes later, I was told that they killed somebody at the next junction after they finished with me.

Maybe you don't know. Whenever a corked gun is pointed at somebody and the gunman steadies his hand on the trigger, he is no longer in control of the gun. It is the devil that dictates whether he should pull the trigger or not. So only God can save the life of whoever that gun is aim at. That was how I started living a 'borrowed life' from that day.

Beloved, the kingdom of God is a two way thing. Firstly, at a point in your life, God will reveal His glory to you, leading to one form of healing in your life. Here let me take any of the results of compassion as healing; then secondly, as the lord has had compassion on you, it is your turn to manifest such compassion in the life of others. Good you are taught, then pass it on to others. You are healed, great, recommend other for healing. Now you can work and earn salary, then feed the hungry around you – These are some of the ways you can extend His kingdom to people around you. Just as a barren woman in Africa will encourage herself and pray: "My mother gave birth to me, so also I will give birth to my own child" As soon as God manifest his compassion upon your life then, take the kingdom of God to anyone you come across whether wicked or good person.

‘One Simus’ Is Waiting

Let’s take a look at Paul’s letter to Philemon: “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him — who is my very heart — back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back — not to mention that you owe me your very self” (Philem 10-20).

Have you ever take a look at this scripture? Here, I saw Paul acted God, telling you the right way to roll out your duties to the people you thought are outcast. He said they are of your own flesh (Isai 58:7). Paul said you should assist people spontaneously, and that if you refuse to do so God will send another person to do same. He said helping people is beneficial to you. He admonished that you should not look down on people who need help today because you too will surely need help tomorrow if not from man, from God.

Everybody needs help; even the richest mortal billionaire need help the next tickling second. If he becomes critically ill, he needs people to bundle him into a waiting van for medical attention. Paul admonished that we should treat those in need as we would treat God Himself, and never be reluctant to do so because of past offence. This is what true kingdom practice demands.

Rich Men Are Short-Sighted

Most rich men unless purified will stay in the status quo of merely been born again which only make them to stretch their neck like giraffe to see the beauty of the kingdom. However, because they are not born of the spirit, they will not enter into the kingdom of God (Lk 3:3, 5). This is reality message. Yes, they will not enter the kingdom of God unless they align their life with kingdom concepts of justice, mercy and faithfulness. To experience the kingdom of God on earth they must dissociate themselves from their wealth. They must see themselves as mere stewards and unprofitable servant. They must understand that it is not by their power they became rich. They should see God as the one who chose to bless them for His purpose. What purpose? As channels to redistribute and communicate His resources to the needy. Until they live either as responsible consumers of God’s resources or as rigorous disciples, they will not be qualified for heaven. Remember the rich ruler Jesus commanded to sell all that he has and distribute to the poor who went away sorrowfully (Luke 18:22-23). That was the only thing he lacked to be a kingdom person.

Living a life of rigorous disciple means you keep distributing to those in need all the wealth that God gave to you as they come into you treasury. This is a replicate of the life Jesus lived on earth. Life of responsible consumption means that you acquire those mandatory needs of yours only, and distribute and communicate the rest of your hard earn resources to those in need. Unless the rich in this world do God’s will with their wealth, their riches will convey them to hell.

Rich men or the favoured should have it at the back of their mind that they became rich as a result of one or two of the following reasons: firstly, by God's sovereignty - God singled them out and decided to bless them, secondly, they might have cheated somewhere, sometimes ago, and thirdly, as a result of hard work. Likewise, they should see the poor as not being in such predicament only because they are lazy as some fondly think. Other biblical reasons for being poor include drunkenness, and pathetic oppression by the same rich men in the society.

Yes, many are in that state of poverty because the rich oppressed them. I want the rich to know that poverty is tentative because Christ has bore their poverty. Notice that only those who have not cast their life vision and proceed on mission would admit that they are poor. God's goodness demand that you help them right now, because they may not need your help tomorrow when the lord might have given them abundance and they become even richer than you.

Now, take a look at this and judge for yourself, a man had distinction in master's degree, for over ten years he could not secure employment even with this good grade, and there you are, an elementary school certificate holder swimming in the pool of money! Would you say that such image of God is lazy? I beg, let the rich in this world change their pit-falling mentality towards the temporarily poor people, whom they hated with great passion. For the record, there are abundant resources in the world to satisfy all of God's creation, the problem lies in the uneven distribution of God's resources, as men are poised to greed, and therefore hoard resources for fear of lack in near future. Jesus warned, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep (Luke 6: 24 -25).

Cost Of Partaking In The Kingdom

Kingdom membership is not something to rush into without taking proper assessment of what it takes to be an obligatory member. Without taking this measure there is every tendency to rush in and be edged out by the law of God. Jesus likened it to somebody intending to build a tower. He said such person should rather sit down first, count the cost to know whether he has sufficient resources to finish it. He said if he lays the foundation and is unable to finish it, he would be ridiculed by onlookers (Luke 14:28). Jesus said whosoever cannot forsake all that he has cannot be member of the kingdom (Luke 14:33).

Jesus made us to understand that as kingdom covenant keeper we must deny ourselves of earthly comfort that war against our members, but He was quick to tell us that whatsoever we shall loose for the sake of the kingdom we will "receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life" (Luke 18:29-30). Kingdom life demands that we leave something behind daily for the sake of the Gospel. As kingdom person you must avoid distractions. Jesus admonished, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.", "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."(Lk 9:60-61).

Satan will want to thwart your efforts in your kingdom work, to this end, Christ said he "will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:19). These keys are to be used to lock out the Devil and to open the doors to usher in breakthroughs and that will enable you to walk in your divine destiny.

Beloved, you must force your way into the kingdom (Luke 16:16) because the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt 11:12). Meaning there are people and things that will act as *wet blanket* in your kingdom walk, wanting to frustrate you so that you will go to hell. God forbid!

The Mystery Of The Kingdom

Life itself is a mystery, talk less of the kingdom of God, which is also wrapped up in a mystery, and it takes the love and wisdom of God to unravel it. Jesus told his disciples, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them” (Mark 4:11-12).

It takes intimacy with God for you to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. Jesus himself was the secret of the kingdom. So being with his twelve disciples, he instructed them of things concerning the kingdom, and they were made to increase in knowledge by every parable, and understood more of the way and method in which Christ designed to set up his kingdom in the world.

Those who know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven must acknowledge that it is given to them; in that they receive both the light and the sight from Jesus Christ, who, after his resurrection, both opened the scriptures, and opened the understanding. The mystery of the kingdom included detailed explanations of what was said in all the Scriptures by Moses and all the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Christ (Luke 24:27). You cannot understand the mystery unless you have deep intimacy with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Referring to Jesus, Luke 24:45-47 says, “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: That Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”

From what we’ve learnt so far on the mystery of the kingdom, it follows that unless you are in Christ you cannot understand the secret of the kingdom. And this goes beyond the born again level. Such understanding will come to those who are matured disciples, Spirit led, and thoroughly sanctified by the Word of God (Jn 17:17). Why is kingdom secret so reserved? Remember Jesus had four levels of audience: the first audience consisting of only Peter. The second level consists of Peter, James, and John. The third audience consists of the twelve disciples while the fourth audience is the multitude. Jesus did not explain the kingdom mystery to the multitude.

So those who are not deep in the knowledge of Christ in our world today will not understand the secret of the kingdom or the hidden truth about the Gospel. Rather they will prefer to make mockery of the Gospel because of ignorance. The Bible says, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (1 Cor 2:14-15). To this category of people who are living in ignorance, Jesus says, they are in darkness “seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them” (Mark 4:11-12). Those who are ignorant of the kingdom are like Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses. They resist the truth because they have corrupt minds, and are reprobate

concerning the faith (2 Tim 3:8). The Devil blindfolds these ones so as to deprive them from enjoying kingdom benefits.

It's A Serious Matter

God expects every man to be committed to things pertaining to the kingdom. He wants total involvement and focus. He wants you to meditate always and take His kingdom to everyone you meet as you journey through life. Remember Jesus caution us not to live by bread alone. Paul said it is not a tea party, "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Rom 14:17). Kingdom life is that of soberness, righteousness and tranquility in spirit.

God's plan is that your kingdom walk should take you beyond charity. He wants you to speak for those who have no voice: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Prov 31:8-9). Only keepers of the great commandment truly belong to the kingdom. Jesus said loving God with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12: 33). Jesus is the symbol of the kingdom.

Kingdom Fruit

Within six days at creation, God spoke for just seven times and produced so much fruit that you and I are still enjoying till today. In like manner, to retain your kingdom membership, you must produce kingdom fruit (Matt 21:43). Identify those God designed you to reach and serve them as you are led by the Spirit. Rain does not fall at unit time everywhere. Rainfall has several catchment areas or grid, so God designed you for a catchment area in your generation. More so, God wants you to refrain yourself from all appearances of evil, disengage from anything that will rob you of His kingdom (Mark 9:47). Kingdom fruits manifest in the forms of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22).

Now, the kingdom of God starts from where you are, but it doesn't end there. It should be taken as far as you yield to the spirit of God and allow him to have his way (Luke 4:42-44). Beloved, you are created to be a global kingdom keeper. That reminds me, a young Levite was in domestic capacity serving one Micah as priest. This Levite had thought that serving that single household was all God wanted him to be in life, until he was enlightened by five warriors from Zorah and Eshtaol that he should go with them, and be their father and priest. They asked him, Isn't it better that you serving a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?" (Judg 18:19).

The Bible says the priest was glad and went along with them. May be you've been localized for so long. Jesus' life affected multitude, so kingdom walk demands that on locating where you belong, multitude should begin to follow you. The Levite would have remained under utilized and waste his destiny.

Kingdom - A Mustard Seed

Jesus said the kingdom of God is like "a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." (Luke 13: 19). Luke 17:21 says the kingdom of God is within you. Meaning when you live in God's kingdom here on earth, the seed of divine destiny in you will grow to an extent whereby you

begin to affect the lives of those God has designed you to reach. Because God loves you, He gave His best for you so that you will not perish and possibly make heaven. Then respond to God's kindness by laying down your lives for others (1Jn3:16).

Suffering Is Part Of The Kingdom

Some theologians will tell you that suffering is not part of your kingdom walk on earth. That's fallacy. There is, except that such sufferings terminate at the end of your sojourn on earth. Though serving along your path of destiny ignites passion, and this passion serve as a stress and pain reducer. This further foster insensitivity and a degree of immunity to suffering and persecution in believers' lives.

Come to think of it, Christ himself suffered on the cross, so also the martyrs. I understood some will say because the Bible says that Christ bore our sickness and diseases, suffering has been nailed with him on the cross, but reality teachings confirms that persecution is part of the kingdom walk on earth. Paul, the great apostle of Jesus Christ suffered untold persecution. "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him, boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:30-31). That is the simplicity of Christ, for an ardent follower of Christ, a Guru, like Paul to live in a rented apartment with contentment and joyfully do ministry.

Many of us will want to cause the day we were born if we find ourselves in the shoes of Paul, who at the level he grew to the love of God made him to stay in rented apartment with contentment. In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith said "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God". To his apostles, Jesus said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). In the beginning of the book of acts, Acts 1:3 to be precise, referring to Jesus the writer says, "After his suffering...".

Finally concerning suffering in kingdom walk, Jesus said kingdom keeper will "receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, *with persecutions* and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:30). Mark you, he didn't say without persecution. This scripture means that in the world here persecution is part of the kingdom walk but when we get to the later part of the kingdom – eternity in heaven, there shall be nothing like persecution.

Kingdom Glance And Entry

The kingdom of God is a possibility for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The word possibility is used selectively because, merely confessing Jesus, and getting baptized is not adequate for you to make heaven. That's just the born again status quo. In 3:16 says "...That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

Born again leverage only enables you to have a glimpse at the kingdom. Yes, just a peep (Lk 3:3). The ultimate status is that realm that enables you to enter the kingdom of God. That's the realm of the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). To enter the kingdom of God you must work it out with all of you by living a spirit filled life, solely dedicated to affecting lives in your area of calling. You must be spirit led. Grow from childhood status to sonship status. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14).

The Wicked And The Kingdom

Paul told the Corinthians, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). He expounded this further in the book of Gal 5:19-21 that when you follow the desires of your sinful nature, you will be taken over by sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. He then said anyone living this sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. This is the portion of the wicked who are kingdom spectators.

Beautiful! We have comfortably deliberated on the kingdom of heaven, and the need to belong and make heaven.

In the next chapter I will be discussing with you all about the pattern of God’s final judgment, which I call the judgment of love. Though the judgment is for the wicked, you must guard yourself against it.

Chapter 2: Love in Judgment

I see God's final judgment as the judgment of love because, God created man in love and for love. He created the first man - Adam. Adam sinned, and we inherited the sin. Despite our falling status, He sought for Abraham, and established His covenant with Him with the aim of bringing man back to his original status. All through the ages, the descendants of Abraham offended Him by living in sin and showing all forms of ingratitude to the sovereign God, yet God continues to show His tender mercy toward us. His royal priesthood or peculiar people – the Israelites went into captivity in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, He brought them out with His awesome power. He gave them law to guide them, and sent His prophets to each generation guide them and warn them from the evil to come. Man never appreciates God's divine effort. Then God decided to leave His seat in Heaven and come down to earth through His only begotten Son – Jesus Christ to save mankind from eternal death. Jesus came, suffered even more than the earlier prophets, and showed man the way back to God, and how man can scale through the last judgment and enter the kingdom of God. God's punishment is just in that it provides salvation and restoration and "can overcome even the power of death". Thank God, Jesus finished his divine assignment of restoring man to his original status in the Garden of Eden. He told us plainly what we should do in order to be where he is presently - Heaven. Therefore, because of this immeasurable love to mankind, if anyone misses heaven, it is his own fault.

God loved us, through love, he created us. Through love, when we were down in sin; He sent His only begotten son into this sinful world to die for our sins to redeem us back to Him. I strongly believe is only a careless student that will fail an examination which the marking script has been shown to him long before the examination was taken. Therefore, based on God's amazing grace, love and kindness, I see God's final judgment as not put in place to hurt those who respond totally to His love. Christ said "if you love me, keep my commandment" (John 14:15-16). Judgment is not for those who loved God and kept His commandment, it is meant to punish those who refused to reverence their maker, but have Satan as their father: "44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). God's perfect character is unchanging. "The Bible says God is love". Therefore, since God considered the love for His children ahead of the judgment to come, then the last judgment is better call 'the judgment in love'. Thank you Holy Spirit, let me quickly add this: When Jesus will mount the judgment seat, mercy, love and sentiment will be on vacation.

The Last Judgment

This is the biblical concept that at the end of history Jesus Christ will return in glory to earth, the dead will be raised, and they, together with all the living, will be finally judged by Christ and assigned their eternal destiny in heaven or hell. This great event will be a visible, public, and universal judgment; Christ's glory and His victory over sin, death, and Satan will be fully manifest; righteousness will be exalted; the perplexing discrepancies of history will be removed, and the mediatorial reign of Christ will reach its ultimate triumph as believers inherit the kingdom prepared for them. The expectation of the final judgment permeates the entire Scripture. It is referred to as "the day of judgment" (Matt 10:15), "the day of the Lord" (Amos

5:18-20), "the day of the Lord Jesus" or "the day of Christ" (1 Cor 1:8), "the great day" (Jude), "the day" or "that day" (Rom 2:16), and "the day of wrath" (Zeph 1:15).

Earlier Judgments

The last or final judgment implies that there were earlier judgments. Basic is the first judgment of God, which brought condemnation and death upon all people and a curse upon the creation as a result of Adam's fall in Paradise (Gen 2:16; 3:14-19; Rom 5:12-14; 1 Cor 15:21). This first judgment continues in effect throughout all of history; the only way of escape from the condemnatory judgment is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Other specific judgments upon individuals and nations have been issued by God in history, e.g., the judgment of Cain, the flood in Noah's days, the confusion of tongues at Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Babylonian captivity of Israel. Justification by faith is a pardoning judgment of God declaring the believer righteous through Christ. At death the person as a disembodied soul is admitted to heaven or hell, a judgment that anticipates the final judgment. The perplexing discrepancies observable in life where the righteous often suffer while the unrighteous prosper (Ps 73; Mal 2:7; 3:14) will be finally resolved at the last judgment.

New Testament Account

In the New Testament, references to the final judgment are more numerous and clearer in the light of the Messiah's presence. John the Baptist's preaching emphasized the coming judgment and urgently called for genuine repentance as the only way of escape (Matt 3:7-10). A similar emphasis upon the approaching judgment was central in Jesus' preaching and some extensive references are given (Matt 13:24-50; 24; 25:31-46). Faith in Jesus as the Messiah is the only way to escape the judgment of wrath. The presupposition of God's sending His Son is that people are already under condemnation (John 3:17) and whoever rejects Christ remains under God's wrath (John 3:36). Paul taught that the Gentiles as well as the unbelieving Jews are under the wrath of God's judgment (Rom 1:18; 2:1-3:20).

Christ The Judge

God the creator and lawgiver, is the judge of all the earth. God's attributes: His omniscience, power, righteousness, and holiness, are displayed in judgment. While God is judge (Ps 50:4; Eccl 12:14; Rom 2:3,5; 6:3; Heb 12:23; James 4:12; 1 Peter 1:17), the Father has given authority to judge at the last day specifically to Jesus Christ, the Mediator (John 5:22,27; Matt 25:31; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Phil 2:10; 2 Tim 4:1,8). Authority to judge the nations is part of Christ's exaltation and is one of the crowning features of His kingship. The Lamb is also the judge (Rev 6:16), and this contributes to the confidence and comfort of the believer on that day (1 John 4:17). When Christ completes His mediatorial work, He will deliver the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 15:24,28).

While Jesus' first coming was pre-eminently for the purpose of salvation (John 3:16), His judging function accounts for His claim that "for judgment I came into this world" (John 9:39). Because the Father judges through the Son, "the judgment seat of God" (Rom 14:10) and "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10) are interchangeable. Angels and believers are associated with Christ in the final judgment (Matt 19:28; 25:31; 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 20:4).

The Judgment Is Worldwide

The last judgment will be absolutely universal and worldwide. All men, women, and children will be judged; the angels, both good and fallen, and also Satan will be judged. The (resurrected) dead and the living, the just and the unjust — all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account of what they have done in life. The books will be opened (Rev 20:12) and everyone will be judged by what he has done, including every idle word and secret thought (Eccl 12:14; Matt 12:36; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 3:13; Rev 20:12). The issue of judgment is sealed at death, for everyone will be judged "according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10). Believers shall also be judged, although Scripture states that they do not come into judgment, in the sense of the condemnatory judgment, for they have already passed from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). Christ refers to the judgment as a separation of the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:32) and wheat from the tares (Matt 13:36). No partiality will be shown, for God is perfectly just. What a person sows, he will also reap; God cannot be mocked (Gal 6:7). Believers will inherit the kingdom and enjoy the full bliss of heaven while unbelievers "shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess 1:9).

Criterion Of Judgment

Christ's judgment will be just. The ultimate criterion of judgment is the revealed will of God. Since God created man perfect, all are held responsible because of Adam's sin (Rom 5:13; 1 Cor 15:21). Gentiles who have received only the revelation of God from Creation are guilty for their sinful suppression (Rom 1:18). But unbelieving Jews are doubly guilty, for they have had the additional revelation of redemption (Rom 2:1-3:20). The whole world is held accountable, and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:19-23). Although the final judgment will take account of the degree of revelation received (Rom 2:12), acquittal comes only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. The announcement of the coming judgment is part of the gospel (Rom 2:16) and constitutes the background for the urgency of preaching and the call to faith in Jesus Christ. The eternal destiny of the individual and the sentence in the last judgment is fixed at death and will not change during the intermediate state between death and the final judgment. Faith in Jesus Christ brings justification now and eternal life at the last judgment. For the unbeliever the appointed day of judgment is a day of wrath (Rom 2:5), but for believers it is the day of redemption (Eph 4:30; 1 John 4:17) when they shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them by Christ their king (Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9).

To The Righteous:

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'" (Matt 25:31-36)

To The Wicked:

Jesus said, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no

food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (Matt 25:41-44).

Now, what role does faith for anyone to spend eternity in heaven? This is our subject of discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Authentic Faith

Faith is very important when sensitive issue such as how to enter the kingdom of Heaven is in focus. You need to belong to the faith that can link you to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6). In the Bible faith is defined as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). In other words, faith is a belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for one's life.

Faith In The Old Testament

According to Heb 11, faith was already present in the experience of many people in the Old Testament as a key element of their spiritual lives. The various heroes of the Old Testament (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses) are said to have lived by faith.

Faith In The New Testament

In the New Testament, "faith" covers various levels of personal commitment. Mere intellectual agreement to a truth is illustrated in James 2:19, where even demons are said to believe that there is one God. Obviously, however, they are not saved by this type of belief. Genuine saving faith is a personal attachment to Christ. This is best thought of as a combination of two ideas - reliance on Christ and commitment to Him.

Saving faith involves personally depending on the finished work of Christ's sacrifice as the only basis for forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven. But saving faith is also a personal commitment of one's life to following Christ in obedience to His commands: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim 1:12).

Faith is part of the Christian life from beginning to end. As the instrument by which the gift of salvation is received (Eph 2:8-9), faith is thus distinct from the basis of salvation, which is grace, and from the outworking of salvation, which is good works. The apostle Paul declared that salvation is through faith, not through keeping the works of the law (Eph 2:8, 9). But in the Bible, true faith is confidence in God or Christ, not in oneself.

Salvation

The foundational thing anyone needs to enter into the kingdom of God is salvation. What is salvation? Salvation is deliverance from the power of sin; redemption. The doctrine of salvation reached its fulfillment in the death of Christ on our behalf. Jesus' mission was to save the world from sin and the wrath of God (Matt 1:21; John 12:47; Rom 5:9). During His earthly ministry, salvation was brought to us by His presence and the power of faith (Luke 19:9-10). Now, our salvation is based on His death and resurrection (Mark 10:25).

The salvation that comes through Christ may be described in three tenses: past, present, and future. When a person believes in Christ, he is saved (Acts 16:31). But we are also in the process of being saved from the power of sin (Rom 8:13; Phil 2:12). Finally, we shall be saved from the very presence of sin (Rom 13:11; Titus 2:12-13). God releases into our lives today the power of

Christ's resurrection (Rom 6:4) and allows us a foretaste of our future life as His children (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14). Our experience of salvation will be complete when Christ returns (Heb 9:28) and the kingdom of God is fully revealed (Matt 13:41-43).

Today, Jesus is no longer on earth as he has ascended to heaven over 2000 years ago. Your salvation hangs on him. You have to believe the cause he died for, his works on earth, for the Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom 10:13). This is where faith comes in. One of the prerequisite for making heaven is that you must believe the word of faith which is preach to you, "for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:10). The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). When your faith is steered up as you hear the word of faith, you confess Christ and get baptized. At this moment your sinful status is changed, as Christ cleanses you of your past sin, and you now become a Christian.

When Adam sinned, "the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken" (Gen 3:23). Hence, Paul recalls this in the book of Romans, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Now let me carefully take you through the procedural pattern of becoming a Christian.

How To Become A Christian

Matthew 7:7 says "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." This is the basic secret of becoming a Christian - you have to want to follow Jesus. I can't make you follow Jesus, no-one can. It's between you and God. In your seeking there are few facts that make the journey a whole lot easier and quicker.

We call this set of facts "the good news of Jesus Christ" or "the gospel" for short. These facts will help you to believe.

Fact one

Everyone, absolutely everyone has fallen short of God's glorious holy standards for their lives. You might not have murdered but you probably have lied. You may not have slept with someone else's wife or husband - but you probably have hated someone or been unjust or cruel. Sin is not just sexual sin or murder, it includes being greedy, jealous, and envious. It includes our thought life too! All that we think in our imaginations is known to God. That is why Paul the apostle can write: (Romans 3:23) "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". All includes me and it also includes you.

Fact Two

God is holy and just, therefore He detests sin. The Bible says: (Romans 6:23) "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin carries the death penalty. There are two kinds of death referred to in the Bible - physical death and eternal spiritual death. Eternal spiritual death means going into torment in Hell forever and ever, it means separation from God, from goodness, from truth, from sanity, from happiness and light. It is eternal torment and disintegration. When we refuse to follow God and obey Him we are rebelling against our Creator and the Source of Life. If we rebel against the Creator it is we who lose. It is God who sustains us, not the other way round! When we tell the Source of Life to stay away from our life and not to interfere we are actually saying "don't supply me with life". To sin, to disobey God, is to attack ourselves in the long run. It's like speeding - fun until you have to

stand before the Judge. Unfortunately the sentence for a life of sin is not a speeding ticket - it is eternal death.

Fact Three

Jesus took our punishment for sin when He died upon the Cross. God prepared a way for sin to be dealt with - through special sacrifices. In the Jewish sacrificial system this was a perfect animal without spot or blemish. Jesus was sinless and was the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of all people for all time. The Bible tells us that God saw that everyone had sinned and was in danger of Hell. He decided to rescue them by sending Jesus to die instead of them. Jesus died on the cross went down into the world of the dead, took our punishment fully and was raised from the dead three days later. Our sins were "nailed to the cross" and dealt with when Jesus died. (Romans 5:8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Anyone who believes in Him can now have their sins forgiven because Jesus' sacrifice has provided forgiveness for everyone who wants it. Some people are too proud to want God's forgiveness. They think they can get to Heaven without the help of Jesus. But as we saw before they can't- because they, like you and I, are guilty before God. And the thing about guilt is that it takes only one crime to make you guilty and deserving of punishment. A thief cannot say "but I did not kill" and a murderer cannot say "I did not steal" - their one crime makes them guilty. So it only takes one sin to make us guilty before God and no-one can say they are good enough for heaven. We all need to accept what Jesus did for us and say thank you to God for it if we are to become true Christians.

Fact Four

The way to become a Christian is by living by two key truths. These key truths are that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He rose from the dead. The first says that He is boss of your life, of your family, and even of the government. Jesus Christ is the "ultimate authority"; He must be obeyed. So when you read the Bible and see a commandment of Jesus you must do it. Once you become a Christian you are like a soldier under the command of Jesus Christ. However His commands are not petty or small-minded. His commands are life-giving, true and the way to salvation and a fulfilling life. Jesus says "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Being a Christian is not meant to be an impossible struggle but a joyful celebration of life. The second thing we have to live by is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This means that we accept that He lived (how else did He die?), that He died (how else did he rise from the dead?), and that God raised Him from the dead on the third day. This means that we too will be raised from the dead to have a life that both lasts for eternity and shares the joy of heaven. The Bible states why we have to believe these things as follows: (Romans 10:9-13) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Having digested the above four facts and you believe and would like to become a Christian, then pray as follows:

Prayer

Dear God, I would like to become a Christian. I know that I have not lived as you want me to. I know I need you to forgive me for all the sins I have done. I ask that you will please forgive me because of what Jesus did on the cross. I believe He died on that cross to take my sins and that You raised Him from the dead. I want to have eternal life from God so that I can follow Jesus and obey Him forever as my Lord. Please make me a Christian now. Amen.

Now that I have led you to Christ, and you're now a Christian, you need to understand clearly what the word justification, and its various forms means.

Justification

Having dealt with salvation, it is pertinent I explain also to you another term – Justification. Justification is the process by which sinful human beings are made acceptable to a holy God. Justification is the work of God where the righteousness of Jesus is reckoned to the sinner so the sinner is declared by God as being righteous under the Law (Rom. 4:3; 5:1,9; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). This righteousness is not earned or retained by any effort of the saved. Justification is an instantaneous occurrence with the result being eternal life. It is based completely and solely upon Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24) and is received by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). No works are necessary whatsoever to obtain justification. Otherwise, it is not a gift (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1).

Christianity is unique because of its teaching of justification by grace (Rom 3:24). Justification is God's declaration that the demands of His Law have been fulfilled in the righteousness of His Son. The basis for this justification is the death of Christ. Paul tells us that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor 5:19). This reconciliation covers all sin: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). Justification, then, is based on the work of Christ, accomplished through His blood (Rom 5:9) and brought to His people through His resurrection (Rom 4:25). When God justifies, He charges the sin of man to Christ and credits the righteousness of Christ to the believer (2 Cor 5:21). God is "just" because His holy standard of perfect righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ, and He is the "justifier," because this righteousness is freely given to the believer (Rom 3:26; 5:16).

Although the Lord Jesus has paid the price for our justification, it is through our faith that He is received and His righteousness is experienced and enjoyed (Rom 3:25-30). Faith is considered righteousness (Rom 4:3,9), not as the work of man (Rom 4:5), but as the gift and work of God (John 6:28-29; Phil 1:29).

The faith that justifies necessarily results in an obedient life, but that obedience is in no way the means or basis of our justification. Our good works, rather, are the evidence that we have true faith and thus the evidence that we possess the righteousness of Christ—but not the basis of our title to eternal life. Just as the lack of fingerprints on the gun did not make the man innocent but revealed his innocence, so neither do our good works make us right with God but, rather, reveal that we are right with God.

The Appropriation Of Faith And Works

In the Christian cycle, the two words: faith and works are often misconstrued which dangerously may lead many Christians to hell.

Now, let's face the truth: Are we justified by faith (Romans) or by works (James)? In Romans Paul says, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight . . ." (Rom.

3:20), and "for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law," (Rom. 3:28), and "For what does the Scripture say? 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Rom. 4:3), and "Therefore, having been justified by faith . . ." (Rom. 5:1), and "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness"(Rom 4:5).

However, James says, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone," (James 2:24) and "...so also faith without works is dead," (James2:26).

Which is it? Are we justified by faith or by works? Does the Bible contradict itself? It is a fundamental Christian belief that we are justified by faith. If the Bible teaches that we are justified by faith, does it also teach that we are justified by works as James seems to say? Do we have a contradiction? The answer is no. It is erroneous to take a verse, read it without its context, and then attempt to develop a doctrine from that verse alone. Therefore, let's take a look at the context of James 2:24 which says that a man is justified by works. James chapter 2 has 26 verses: Verses 1-7 instruct us not to show favoritism. Verses 8- 13 are comments on the Law. Verses 14-26 are about the relationship between faith and works.

Notice that James begins this section by using the example of someone who says he has faith, verses 14. He then immediately gives an example of what true and false faiths are. He begins with the negative and demonstrates what an empty faith is (verses 15-17). Then he shows that that type of faith isn't much different from the faith of demons (verse 19). Finally, he gives examples of living faith by showing Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who demonstrated their faith by their deeds.

James is examining two kinds of faith: one that leads to godly works and one that does not. One is true, and the other is false. One is dead, the other is alive; hence, "Faith without works is dead," (James 2:20). This is why in the middle of his section on faith and works, he says in verse 19, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." James says this because the demons believe in God, that is, they have faith, but the faith they have is useless. It does not result in appropriate works. Their faith is only a mental acknowledgment of God's existence.

Two words are worth introducing here: *ascentia* and *fiducia*. *Ascentia* is the mental acknowledgment of something's existence. The demons acknowledge and believe that God exists. *Fiducia* is more than mental acknowledgment. It involves a trust in something, a giving over to it, a complete believing and acceptance of something. This is the kind of faith that a Christian should have in Christ. A true Christian, therefore, has *fiducia*; that is, he has *real faith* and trust in Christ, not simply an acknowledgment that He lived on earth at one time. Another way to put this is that there are many people in the world who believed that Jesus lived: *ascentia*. But they do not believe that He is their savior, the one to be looked up to and trusted for the forgiveness of their sins. *Ascentia* does not lead to works. *Fiducia* does. *Ascentia* is not of the heart. *Fiducia* is.

Therefore, what is James Saying? James is simply saying that if you 'say' you are a true Christian, then there had better be some appropriate works manifested or your faith is false. This sentiment is echoed in 1 John 2:4 which says, "If you say you have come to know Him, yet you do not keep His commandments, then the truth is not in you and you are a liar." Apparently, there are people who are saying they are Christians, but do not manifest any of the fruits of Christianity. Can this faith justify? Can the dead 'faith' that someone has which produces no

change in a person and no good works before men and God be a faith that justifies? Absolutely not!. It is not merely enough to say you believe in Jesus. You must actually believe and trust in Him. If you actually do, then you will demonstrate that faith by a changed and godly life. If not, then your profession is of no more value than the same profession of demons: "We believe Jesus lived."

Notice that James actually quotes the same verse that Paul uses to support the teaching of justification by faith in Rom. 4:3. James 2:23 says, "and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" If James was trying to teach a contradictory doctrine of faith and works than the other New Testament writers, then he would not have used Abraham as an example. Therefore, we are justified by faith. That is, we are made righteous in the eyes of God by faith as is amply demonstrated by Romans. However, that faith, if it is true, will result in deeds appropriate to salvation. After all, didn't God say in Eph. 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

A clear distinction between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25) gives the solution to this problem. Not only is Christ's righteousness legally accounted to the believer, but Christ also dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:10), creating works of faith (Eph 2:10). Certainly God's works may be declared righteous (Isa 26:12). If this is true, then the order of events in justification is grace, faith, and works; or, in other words, by grace, through faith, resulting in works (Eph 2:8-10).

Sanctification

Another term that is worth mentioning is Sanctification. Sanctification involves the work of a person. But it is still God working in the believer to produce more of a godly character and life in the person who has already been justified (Phil. 2:13). Sanctification is not instantaneous because it is not the work of God alone. The justified person is actively involved in submitting to God's will, resisting sin, seeking holiness, and working to be more godly (Gal. 5:22-23). Significantly, sanctification has no bearing on justification. That is, even if we don't live a perfect life, we are still justified.

Where justification is a legal declaration that is instantaneous, sanctification is a process. Where justification comes from outside of us, from God, sanctification comes from God within us by the work of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Bible. In other words, we contribute to sanctification through our efforts. In contrast, we do not contribute to our justification through our efforts.

This is one of the areas of quandary in Christianity. Many Christians believe that the moment they are born again, they will make heaven irrespective of their level of sanctification and their deeds in life. They missed it because what would really count is the deeds of the person which he must work out himself, not justification by faith which Christ did for him.

Chapter 4: Biblical Justice

Introducing the right Justice

When sensitive issues such as how can a man enter the kingdom of God is discussed, it is of great importance to revert to the voices of biblical characters such as Prophets Micah, Malachi, John the Baptist, Apostle James and Jesus Christ.

Micah told the people of Israel, you must have seen the Lord's righteous act in the past. God cannot be moved by your offerings, even if you offer your firstborn for your sins. However, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:5-8).

Jesus upheld Prophet Micah statement in Matt 23:23, when he observed that the teachers of the law and Pharisees were demonstrating outward righteousness by paying their tithes but inwardly their heart was far from God, and full of greed and self-indulgence, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former... Blind Pharisee!" (Matt 23:23,26). The book of Luke still refers to the issue, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Luke 11:42).

The above scriptures clearly revealed to us that God requires four things from us. These are doing justice, showing mercy, walking humbly with Him, and regular payment of tithe.

Furthermore, God spoke through Malachi concerning the payment of tithe and offerings as follows: "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "in tithes and offerings" (Mal 3:8).

Now, let's consider John the Baptist's account on how to prepare for Christ. Before Jesus came into limelight, John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan river, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they have turned to God and receive forgiveness for their sins. When the crowd came to him for baptism, he said, "Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God..." (Luke 3:7).

When the crowd heard what John the Baptist said, fear gripped them. Then they asked him, "What should we do?" Then John commandment them as follows: "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry." To the corrupt tax collectors who came to be baptized, he said, "Collect no more taxes than the government requires." To the soldiers, he said, "Don't extort money or make false accusations, and be content with your pay." (Luke 3:11-14).

Apostle James' statement is also relevant for our consumption in this study. James said, "if you obey the royal law as found in the scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself", you will not favour some people over others (James 2:8-9). He went further to say that faith should be shown by actions. "Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person

any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless" (James 2:14-17).

James remarked further, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." (James 2: 18). He said further in James 1:27: "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you". Here, James stated emphatically that God wants us to cater for the orphans and widows in our midst. But I tell you; this scripture's spiritual connotation demands that we see anyone having need as an orphan or widow which we must look after. He wants you to see yourself as the provider of what the parent or husband of such needy person would have under obligation done for him. You may want to ask, am I under obligation to help the needy? Yes, God says you are.

The book of First John was written by 'the one whom Jesus loved'. John told us that the only way anyone can claim that he knows love is to reciprocate God's love by living for others. Here what he said, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17). The word 'bowel' here means heart.

Having gone this far itemizing what God wants from us, let's cap it up with the assertion of the Messiah— Jesus Christ. In Matt chapter 25, Jesus exclusively told us what God requires for anyone to enter the kingdom of heaven. He began by likening the kingdom of heaven to a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. He said the man gave each servant talents according to his ability, to work with and make profit. Jesus said their master returned from his trip at a later date and asked them to give an account of how they had used his precious talents.

Here, Jesus was telling us that every one of us on earth is endowed by the almighty with unique abilities to serve humanity and affect his generation. That unique individual will render account to Jesus at his second coming. This account of service is his works or deeds. You and I are the servants powered with divine talents while Jesus is the one that when on a far journey.

Interestingly, in the same chapter, Jesus moved from the parable of the talent to the nature of his judgment at his second coming. Jesus pointed out that his judgment will be based on the outcome of talents handling within each man's life span.

Jesus said, without mincing words, when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne and pass judgment saying, "to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me'" (Matt 25:34-36).

Jesus reiterated, these righteous ones will find it difficult to remember when they did these good deeds to him, so he was quick to tell them that "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" (Matt 25:40).

So, beloved, you can see clearly for yourself that everything on the subject of entering the kingdom of God or making heaven is attached to deeds on earth. Remember your deeds have to do with your overall performance, activities you were involved in, the actions you took, and your manners and conduct when you were on earth. So, to enable you have rightful deeds or works, I

have itemized what leads to good deeds in the remaining chapters in such a down-to-earth way that it will only be your fault if you miss heaven.

Good works are the product of all of the followings: Biblical justice, Mercy, Faithfulness, Tithing, Giving: Tangible giving (offering and alms), Intangible giving (living for others).

What is Biblical Justice?

Justice is the practice of what is right and just. Justice (or "judgment,") specifies what is right, not only as measured by a code of law, but also by what makes for right relationships as well as harmony and peace. The English term justice has a strong legal flavor. But the concept of justice in the Bible (Biblical justice) goes beyond the law courts to everyday life. The Bible speaks of "doing justice", whereas the world speak of "getting justice." "Give justice to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people" (Ps 82:3-4), "The Lord is more pleased when we do what is right and just than when we offer him sacrifices" (Prov 21:3).

Doing justice is to maintain what is right or to set things right. Justice is done when honorable relations are maintained between husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, government and citizens, and man and God. Justice refers to brotherliness in spirit and action. The prophets of the Old Testament were champions of social justice. During those days, justice was often perverted through bribery and favoritism or partiality (Deut 1:17, Prov 17:23). But God's rewards come to those who practice justice in all their dealings with others. The Bible says, "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people" (2 Sam 8:15)

Again, the justice of God refers to God's fair and impartial treatment of all people. As a God of justice (Isa 30:18), He is interested in fairness as well as in what makes for right relationships. His actions and decisions are true and right (Job 34:12; Rev 16:7). His demands on individuals and nations to look after victims of oppression are just demands (Ps 82). As Lord and Judge, God brings justice to nations (Ps 67:4) and "sets things right" on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the victims of injustice (Ps 103:6; 146:6-9). For the wicked, the unjust, and the oppressor, God as supreme Judge of the earth is a dreaded force. But for all who are unjustly treated, God's just action is reason for hope.

Christian Justice

The nature and content of the justice of God informs the practice of Christian justice. The Hebrew terms *sedāqā* (righteousness) and *mīspat* (justice) are consistently tied together in relationship to God's role as judge; their meanings at-times are practically synonymous. To distinguish between the two terms, 'justice' usually relates to legal issues, while 'righteousness' denotes "conformity to a norm. Often the norm is the covenant." Both terms are interpreted in the light of the covenant's purpose in maintaining relationship between God and the people and the people with their neighbors.

Righteousness is "the underlying soul of justice." Although justice involves legal issues, it does not compare to righteousness's "burning compassion for the oppressed." In reality, God's justice cannot be separated from God's love. While it is arguable that justice is central to the Old Testament, other intertwining concepts, such as God's love, mercy, compassion, grace, and truth, help to interpret the Old Testament view of justice. God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus served as the foundation of Israel's understanding of Yahweh's concern and purpose to

deliver the suffering. The Scriptures reveal God to be the champion of the outsider, the sojourner, the orphan and the widow. Defending the poor and the marginalized was the focus of Israel's social justice, "But a beautiful cedar palace does not make a great king! Your father, Josiah, also had plenty to eat and drink. But he was just and right in all his dealings. That is why God blessed him. He gave justice and help to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. Isn't that *what it means to know me?*" says the Lord" (Jer. 22:15-16).

The Partiality Of Biblical Justice

Is God's justice partial or impartial? The popular Western concept of impartial justice derives from the memorable statue of the blindfolded goddess of justice who reminds all that justice plays no favorites. Biblical justice alternatively is not impartial, since it consistently shows preference to the marginalized and oppressed. This partiality is grounded in the concept of covenant community that finds persons to be part of one another as members of the community.

Western society's view of justice is based on the assumption that "individuals naturally live in separation from one another," results in the need for a justice that protects people from harming each other. The biblical model conversely upholds the idea of mutual and active care for community members (and strangers) in a context in which social, family and covenant relations are the focus of life — affirming justice as "that which is regarded as of basic importance in social relationships."

Who Deserves Justice?

The tendency to question whether or not someone "deserves" to receive justice or even mercy (an attitude pervading much of our modern life inside and outside of church) cannot be defended from Scripture. *Neither Jesus nor the disciples asked potential recipients of attention about their work history, their dependence on addictive substances, their mental state or any other discriminating type of question.*

Jesus simply felt compassion for people's needs. Most church members on the other hand seem to forget that their blessings and salvation and wholeness are the result of God's grace and not their inherent goodness. Therefore, they are able to justify the small line item for benevolences in their church budgets because "so many of those people" do not deserve any of our bounty. This brings us to the subject of Jubilee as a clue.

Jubilean Justice

The idea of jubilean justice is the underlying motivation or purpose in showing justice? Jubilean justice, for example, as set forth in Deut. 15:1-11, purposed to maintain the distressed within the confines of community (cf. Lev. 25:35; Ps. 107:36). The jubilean code envisioned a radical change in social practice with the "scheduled cancellation of the debts of the poor." In antiquity when the poor, as their only recourse, sold themselves into slavery, they became entangled in a trap from which there was no escape. The remission of debts provided by this legislation revealed the purpose of God as compassionate and just protector of the helpless.

The Just Individual

The people of the Old Testament were in relationship with God because of the covenant that existed between God and Israel. As a member of this covenant community, each person was in relationship with every other person, including poor and needy people, one's family, and even

strangers and aliens. Out of these relationships arose responsibilities and demands. The just person was faithful to these responsibilities and demands.

Psalms, Proverbs, and Job describe *the just individual as one who preserves the wholeness of the community (Job 4:3-4) and who helps the weak, the orphan, and the widow (Prov. 29:7; Job 31:16-19)*. This just one defends the helpless and exercises appropriate care over his land and employees (Job 31:13). The wisdom literature reveals that “justice is a harmony which comes from a right relationship to the covenant Lord and to the neighbor to whom a person is related by covenant bond.”

Justice In Jesus’ “Upside-Down Kingdom”

To ignore issues of justice and integrity exposes the church to accusations of aiding injustice. Genesis 2 clearly reveals that God created humankind to live together in community; being called the people of God requires even greater attention to injustice, especially that perpetuated by God’s people. Historically, when interpreting Jesus’ teachings and work, Churches have emphasized the spiritual over the social/physical needs of persons.

The numbers of converts that churches proudly proclaim (but cannot always locate) reveal a proclivity for addressing spiritual needs to the neglect of the social. Jesus’ ministry focused on the spiritual needs of people, but, as a close inspection of the New Testament reveals, He also dealt clearly with the *needs of the whole person*. Jesus’ self-proclaimed mission in Luke 4:18-21, where he quotes Isa. 61:1 indicates attention to the whole person. Unfortunately, most churches have interpreted the passage as relating only to the spiritual. The jubilean nature of the Isaiah passage must have been recognized by Jesus as having to do with justice—in every realm of life.

Recalling the themes of Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55, Jesus revealed His upside-down kingdom as a *radical reversal of normal human values*. The focus then of His first coming to the world was on the poor, the enslaved, the blind, and the downtrodden, a focus that embodied God’s nature as defender of the weak. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament teaching concerning justice for the needy and helpless in his teaching and in his attention to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of people.

The church then becomes *the stage on which Jesus’ radical way of living is acted out*. By the work of God’s original mercy, *the church should be seen as home for the odd ones*. Indeed, the New Testament decisively teaches that Christians must establish justice in the present (1 John 3:17-18; James 2:14-17). The Church has been given the Scriptures and the empowering of Holy Spirit who bestows gifts upon the Church “to renovate and restore us to the image of Christ so Christians should, through knowing him, become like Him in character and conduct (see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).”

God has revealed His universal demand for righteousness and justice, and did not give the Church an imbalanced and limited gospel, neither a Social Gospel nor a gospel solely interested in evangelism. God gave the Church a gospel that is to leaven (enhance) every aspect of life—private and public, individual and community. Therefore Christ’s followers must vigorously pursue social justice as a universal due that transcend any partisan or self-serving agendas.

In both the Old and New testaments, *being in relationship with God means taking up the cause of the lowly and poor*. With Jesus as our example we cannot separate faith from doing justice. “Justice is concrete. It combines non-exploitation of the poor and taking their cause. The doing

of justice is not the application of religious faith, but its substance: without it God remains unknown.

God's Ownership, Our Stewardship

God created the world and all that is in it. Therefore God is the owner of everything in creation. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (Psalm 24:1). God invites human beings to be good stewards of what belongs to Him. Stewardship is a way of managing our possessions. It means rather that we care for what God has entrusted to us.

Let My People Go!

The justice of God is vividly portrayed in God's concern for the Israelite people when they were in Egypt. In the hold of bondage and slavery, they cried out to God, for help (Exodus 2:23-25). God called Moses to deliver the Israelite people from slavery: "Then the Lord said: I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:7-8). The Exodus is the fundamental experience for the Jewish people. Every year the community of Israel gathers to celebrate and relieve the Exodus. They are to remember that their God frees them from oppression and injustice. If they are to be faithful to God, they must free the oppressed and do justice toward others.

Defender Of The Oppressed

In the legal tradition of the Old Testament, we find the theme of concern for the oppressed and poor of the society: "The resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake" (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Concern for the oppressed and the poor was at the core of the Israelites' calling. This concern was rooted not only in the covenant, but more importantly, in the very nature of God. God is the defender of the oppressed, the One who liberates the captives, the One who feeds hungry people: "(The Lord) executes justice for the oppressed; ... gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind" (Psalm 146:7-8).

Share Your Bread With The Hungry

Throughout Israel's history, the prophets reminded Israel in their messages to remain faithful to the covenant. Their primary mission was to lead the people back to the path of righteousness and justice. The prophets were sent not only to speak God's word, but also to speak on behalf of those who had no voice. God complained through the prophets that the people had forgotten who it was that gave them their land and provisions. *They, who once were hungry and oppressed, refused to feed the hungry and themselves became the oppressors.* The people of Israel spoke folly and left the craving of the hungry unsatisfied (Isaiah 32:6, paraphrased).

God spoke again through Prophet Isaiah, making us to understand that, we should remove hypocrisy from our religious practices such as prayer, fasting and alms giving. He said fasting without a display of true justice is not accepted by Him, "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isa 58:6-7).

Amos was one of the strongest in calling the people back to the way of justice. Israel was at the height of her economic and political power when God sent the poor shepherd Amos to call the people of Israel to repentance. These people had often transgressed against the covenant. One transgression was that they oppressed the poor and robbed them of their grain (Amos 5:11a). The injustice that the rich engaged in completely negated the value of their worship: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (Amos 5:21-24).

When there is no justice, life is barren and worship of God is a sham (pretence).

Shalom: The Vision Of Peace

Where will justice lead us? Doing justice, (1) make us to know God better: “Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord” (Jeremiah 22:15b-16). In addition to knowing God better, (2) doing justice leads to shalom, peace: “Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever” (Isaiah 31:16-17). Where there is justice there is the possibility of peace. The opposite is also true: where there is oppression and injustice there can be no shalom. This is why there is no peace in the world. What is this shalom God is calling us to experience? It is certainly more than the absence of war and violence. *The basic meaning of shalom is wholeness.* It involves all the conditions of life that make for wholeness and harmony. Shalom is the goal of God's work as deliverer and liberator.

God's purpose in the world is to restore shalom wherever it has been broken. God's will for all is shalom, and the task of the community of faith is to do God's will. With Jesus, we have the fullness of shalom, of justice and peace. Jesus is our path to justice and peace. In him, we know and have the justice and peace of God. In Jesus, God's covenant has been renewed, and we are called to be agent's of God's shalom in the world. Paul reminds us that Jesus, “Though he was rich For your sakes ... became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Christ Among Us

Jesus is the Poor One among us. He identified himself with poor and hungry people and those who suffer and are in need of help. Christians thus come face to face with a great mystery. God in Christ is present in a special way in poor and hungry people (Matthew 25:31-46). Christ represents himself to us in a special way in the hungry, the naked, the sick and the prisoner. *He is among us in the outcasts and the oppressed of our age.* Their cry for justice is Christ's cry for justice. The very Christ who suffered and died on the cross that all might be reconciled to God is crucified again and again in the suffering and death of poor and hungry people.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the new Christian community was care for those in need. Following the example of their Lord, the early church found ways to care for poor and hungry people, the needy in their midst. The Bible does not offer us a ten-point program or a five-year plan of action on how to combat injustice in our world. Rather, the scriptures give us a

vision of a new creation. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more ... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelations 7:16-17).

How To Deal With Offenders

One area that everyone that wants to make heaven should be careful about is being very careful when dealing with offenders. Well, I agree with you that that person did wronged you, but remember what the Bible says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8-9). Beloved, you must ask God for the wisdom to execute justice, in like manner Solomon prayed, “Give your servant a discerning heart ...to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9). This prayer is powerful. As soon as God granted Solomon’s request of discernment, he passed one of the best judgment in the annals of history. It was a judgment wrapped up in justice. Two prostitutes who lived in the same house were brought to King Solomon, one alleged to have stolen the other’s living child in the night and replace it with her own dead child. They came to the king with the living child and the king threatened to cut the living child into two equal parts with a sword.

The rightful mother of the child screamed and pleaded that the child should not be killed, instead be giving to the other woman alive who faked, but the daughter of Belial - woman said the child should be cut into halves. The king then passed his judgment that the living child be giving to the true owner – the one who said the child should not be killed with the sword. Amazingly, this story ended abruptly in the Bible. Nothing was mentioned concerning what evil befell the thief, that is, the woman who stole her neighbour’s living child. This is what God’s pattern of justice is about concerning how we should treat our offenders. If it were the worldly wisdom kind of justice, the story would have continued and end tragically because the woman who stole her neighbour’s child would have been sentenced to life imprisonment or several years of imprisonment with hard labour.

The Bible says sin is sin. It is had for any mortal man to remain sinless; we are only restored through our incessant plea for mercy. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8-9)

Nowadays, when it comes to justice, believers are not different from the unbelievers, as they keep penalizing offenders who come their way using the world kind of justice rather than the biblical kind of justice as a yardstick. If you are heaven bound, God want you to understand that whatsoever you have in life belongs to him. You are mere stewards of God’s property. So if anyone rub you off or spoil anything that God has giving you, justice demand that you let that offender go free, and leave vengeance for God (Ps 94:1).

Did I hear you say what if somebody bashes your car? Beautiful! In the first place the car is not even yours - it’s God’s own. Let him go free. Whatever evil anybody do to you, stop attributing it to the person rather see the Devil as being responsible (Acts 10:38b). Extending this hand of fellowship towards offenders and the oppressed will earn you that rare ticket you need to enter heaven. Whenever anyone do you wrong you must ask yourself as fondly said, ‘What would Jesus do’ to the offender if he were in my shoes?

Chapter 5: Mercy

Showing mercy is an attitude God require of us to make heaven. What is mercy? Mercy is the aspect of God's love that causes Him to help the miserable. Those who are miserable may be so either because of breaking God's law or because of circumstances beyond their control. God shows mercy upon those who have broken His law, although such mercy is selective, demonstrating that it is not deserved. God also shows mercy by actively helping those who are miserable due to circumstances beyond their control. We see this aspect of mercy especially in the life of our Lord Jesus. He healed blind men (Matt 9:27-31; 20:29-34) and lepers (Luke 17:11-19). These acts of healing grew out of his attitude of compassion and mercy.

The word mercy is tantamount to compassion. Compassion means to feel sympathy, to pity. In English, the word compassion actually comes from two words meaning "suffer with". A person with compassion is willing to "rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15) and, we may add, suffer with those who suffer. Whenever we come in contact with people in need God expect us to be moved with compassion. We should have attitude of sympathy, mercy and pity towards others who are hurting, deprived, or suffering loss. Due to sin the ability to have compassion is in small or large measure ruined, but when we are "born again", it comes alive again in full measure. As I mention earlier, there are seven results of Compassion, namely: Teaching, Feeding, Healing, Delivering, Forgiving, Helping a wounded neighbour, and Prayer intercession. Even though the first four were attributed to Jesus the Messiah, he has extended it to us having endued us with power at Pentecost. When compassion moves us, let's be available to be used to meet the needs according to His purpose and power. We are also mandated by Christ to respond willy-nilly to compassion by forgiving, helping and praying for others.

This may hurt you, many wives will not only miss heaven, they will also take their husband along to hell. Why? This is because often times when a husband is moved with compassion and wants to render help to the needy, the wife incessantly prevents him from doing so. Such wife is not a virtuous woman: "She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy" (Prov 31:20).

Several years back, I never knew that my ministry message was built around compassion as subject. I noticed that whenever I see a disabled person, or an oppressed person, I usually develop a strange emotional feeling towards such person, and in a moment, I will begin to pray in my heart for that person, most times asking God to alleviate his or her suffering or heal him outrightly from such ailment. Every human being has in-built compassion, use yours; don't let it die. Never find fault with the afflicted. Don't only pity a sufferer, do something, be empathetic. Be an advocate to the less privileged. I advice you today just as the mother of king Lemuel advised her son, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Prov 31:8-9).

Two decades ago when I was a University undergraduate, some policemen came to raid a nearby patent medicine store, and manhandled the operator of the chemist. I came to the balcony of our house, moved by compassion I hissed to the hearing of the policemen to register a protest for detesting what the policemen were doing to that poor man. Trust our kind of police, they came

for me. Bundled me into their vehicle and put me behind the counter in their station for over seven hours. When they knew that I was an undergraduate, they became more furious, some filled with inferiority complex, began to rain abuse on Nigerian students.

Less than two hours while in the police station, my relatives came, I told them that they should not plead for my release. Why? I was feeling very comfortable and felt that that was the best place I ought to be in that particular time, fighting the cause God created me for. The Police soon got tired of having such a horrible guest like me and later let me off by five in the evening. That was the first signal that God designed me to stand in gap for the oppressed in my generation and those yet unborn.

Because God is merciful, He expects His children to be merciful, “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you” (James 1:27). A clean and undefiled religion is one in which one's conduct and characters are disciplined in accordance with God's Word. It is apparent that God's emphasis is not on religious ritual but on right living.

A believer with God-pleasing "religion" helps others in need - and thus is faultless, and keeps himself pure. James made it clear here that true religion finds an outlet in service, a service which demands that a believer learn to accept others without prejudice and to assist others without presumption.

In James 2:1-13, James became increasingly specific and direct in his admonitions and instructions. He was obviously displeased with the inconsistencies among brethren. He attacked the attitude believers displayed toward others and then complained of their failures to act as they should. He first condemned the attitude of favoritism and gave suggestions on how to combat this obstacle, to spiritual maturity. One must learn to accept others, whatever their status or class. He must show courtesy to all, compassion for all, and consistency to all. Equity, love, and fidelity are the vital ingredients. The merciful shall receive mercy as reward, “Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy” (Matt 5:7). Notice that that which renders one incapable of being merciful to others also renders one incapable of receiving mercy from others or God.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:23-25), the king compassionately forgave the enormous debt one of his servant owed him, but the servant dealt harshly with his fellow servant who owed him only a token. The ruthless servant was punished because mercy requires mercy (Matt 18:33). James states the corollary: "judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13). The requirement for showing mercy is clearly expressed in Luke's Gospel. Disciples are to be merciful, as their Father in heaven is merciful (Luke 6:36). By showing mercy, the Samaritan proved to be the neighbor of the man who fell among robbers; Jesus commanded the inquisitive lawyer to go and do likewise (Luke 10:37). The tormented rich man cried out to Abraham for mercy but received none since he did not shown mercy to Lazarus before he died (Luke 16:19-25).

A person is merciless when he deliberately rejects the knowledge of God. Mercy forms a paramount part in the lists of Christian virtues, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere”(James 3:17), “showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Rom 12:8). Paul said, “Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a *violent man*, I was shown mercy because I acted in *ignorance and unbelief*. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:13-14). As you are

reading this book now, God is saying to you that he has extended his hand of mercy upon you because you've acted in ignorance, but he warns, hence forth pour out great mercy on anyone you come across.

Goodness And Mercy

The Psalmist said, goodness and mercy would follow him all his life. Are you a giver of goodness and mercy? How many people have you shown mercy to? How many people have you affected there lives for good? David merited being shown goodness and mercy by God that was why he commanded them to manifest in his life.

'The Grace Of God'

The grace of God is often shared in many believers' gathering: May "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Cor 13:14). Good, grace means unmerited favour or something for nothing. Though favour is orchestrated by God, it manifests from both man and God (Lk2:52). The love of God has the prerequisite of you loving Him first (Rom 8:28). Your proof of loving Him is through doing justice to those you come across. You can only benefit from the fellowship of the Holy Spirit if you walk according to His will. So, these precautions must be meant before asking the grace of God to abide in you, otherwise it is merely a religious sacrilege.

Offences And Unforgiveness

It is difficult for anyone who harbor grudges in his heart to have mercy on others. This is because, when he remembers his past hurts, he will be discouraged from manifesting this godly virtue called mercy.

Forgiveness is one of the principles for positive change. It is defined as the act of excusing or pardoning another in spite of his slights, shortcomings, and errors. God wants you to forgive everyone and release self of your past. When we subscribe to unforgiveness, we are nurturing anger, hatred, resentment and guilt. These emotions will lock us into the moment and drain our mental and life energy. Holding such emotions inside for a long time will create sickness in the soul and in the body.

I tell you, offence and unforgiveness will lead many to hell fire. Below is an extract of what Jesus told his followers when they asked him to teach them how to pray: "Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:11-15).

Jesus was very mindful of offence. When those who collect temple tax at Capernaum demanded that Jesus should pay temple tax, Jesus told Peter though as sons we are free, but for us not to offend them, go to the sea and bring the money I kept there and pay them (Matt 17:26-27). Jesus paid the tax because he knew that Satan the accuser of the brethren would hold that against him in his earthly ministry and afflict him under the permissive will of God (Rev 12:10).

Jesus told us clearly that offences would always come, and that it would be better for someone if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones (Luke 17:2). The little one refers to anyone who comes your way whether of the Christian fold or of other religion. Christ wants you to threat him the way you

would have treated he himself. Jesus said further in the same scripture, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4).

Peter sought permission from his master to punish anyone that offends him at the count of seven, but Jesus told him, you missed it boy! You must allow him to offend you seven times seventy times before you retaliate. This prompted Jesus to narrate the parable of an unmerciful servant who owed his master ten thousand talents and his master was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. This same servant later saw his fellow servant who owed him just a hundred pence, went ahead and strangulate him. Jesus said when the news got to his master, his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.(Matt 18:21-34).

If “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not and are new every morning through the greatness of His faithfulness” (Lam 3:22-23), then we should reciprocate by showing unlimited compassion on others. Your being alive today, Jesus said is not by your uprightness, but because God is a God of several chances, not only God of second chance. Remember Jesus told us of the tower in Siloam that suddenly fell on eighteen and killed them, and the Galileans who were killed by Pilate probably as a result of a protest in Jerusalem (Luke 13:6-9). Jesus asked, “do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Luke 13:4-5).

Those victims never thought they would die in those circumstances. But you are alive today so that you can locate where you belong, your part of God’s purpose on earth and fulfil it within your lifespan.

I want you to know that you are alive today because of Christ standing in gap for you, pleading on your behalf in a way similar to the vine dresser’s plea to the owner of the vineyard that he should give a year of grace to the vine that refused to bear fruit for three years, and was to be cut off (Luke 13:6-9).

Similarly your guarding angel has been ascending and descending to heaven on your behalf. Ex 23:20-21 says, “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him”. The ascending and descending angel is poised to manifest the glory of God through your destiny, by your move of compassion to touch lives.

Let me quickly add that to be accepted by God you must frequently pray for forgiveness. Some Christians would want to fool themselves by saying that they no longer commit sin. This belief must be faulty. Self righteousness is a sin on its own. Jesus said temptation will always come. Soaking prayers and sanctification through the Word are the way out.

That was what made David to sail through. He regularly acknowledged his sins before man and God. That is great humility. I tell you, I don’t know if you ever met some people in life who prefer to die rather than say the five lettered word ‘sorry’ to mend fence with an aggrieved person when they are actually wrong. That is pride of life – a class of sin. David approached God with humility, praise, acknowledgement and confession of sins and plea of forgiveness. He does this repeatedly.

Personally, once in a while especially in the past, I used to exchange words with people due to 'reflex action'. But as soon as I did that my spirit man, my living conscience will tell me Moses you've messed up, in less than five minutes of committing the sin, I will get on my knees and ask God for forgiveness. When some Christians overheard fellow Christians praying the prayer of forgiveness they felt such brothers or sisters are outcasts or backsliders. That is not true. It takes humility and living conscience to ask God for mercy.

The Bible says: "It is necessary that temptations come" (Matt 18:7). You must carefully examine yourself and spot that aspect of your make-up or organ of the body that is luring you to sin and guard it jealously. Job, a man who feared God so much that refused to curse Him even when everybody including his wife said he should do so, said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1). Beloved you must enter into covenant with some of the organs in your body if thoroughly you desire to make heaven. Maybe it is your tongue that you need to tame and bridle because of its unruly nature.

Illustration Of Compassion

One major scriptures that illustrate compassion in the Bible is Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan who had pity on the man that fell into the hands of robbers (Luke 10:30-35). The second parable that illustrate compassion is the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20-24). Pharaoh's daughter's attitude to Moses when he was thrown into the water in a basket, by offering to nurse him in the palace knowing fully well that he was marked to die was an act of compassion (Ex 2:5-10).

When David was in the desert and being pursued by his Absalom, Shobi, Makir and Barzillai and some other people had compassion on David and his men and sent food to them on impulse (2 Sam 17:27-29NIV). Elijah's restoring to life of the dead son of the widow of Zarephath was also a move of compassion (1 Kings 17:17-24). Nehemiah's response to the suffering of the people of Judah was a move of compassion (Neh 1:3-5).

Job's friends displayed attitudes of compassion when they learnt of his tribulation: "When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights" (Job 2:11-13). Job tells of his compassion (Job 30:25NIV). The Psalmist described his move of compassion (Ps 35:13-14).

Chapter 6: Humble walk with God

Faithfulness is a must for anyone who wants to make heaven. Faithfulness means dependability, loyalty, truthfulness and stability particularly as it describes God in His relationship to human believers. Faithfulness implies walking humbly with God. God's faithfulness is the source of the Christian's deliverance from temptation (1 Cor 10:13); assurance of salvation (Heb 10:23); and forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9). He is faithful to His children because He is first of all faithful to Himself (2 Tim 2:13). God's faithfulness should be so deeply reflected in the lives of His people (Gal 5:22) that they can be called simply "the faithful" (Ps 31:23). The New Testament speaks of the faithfulness of Paul (1 Cor 7:25), Abraham (Neh 9:8), and Moses (Heb 3:5).

Faithfulness is expected in Christian believers. Faithfulness to one's fellowman is seen especially in relation to fulfilling an office. A steward must be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2), just as Daniel and other persons in the Bible exercised their faithfulness toward God (Dan 6:4; 2 Tim 2:2).

God's loyalty to His covenant demands a response of loyalty from His people. God is faithful, says Moses in Deut 7:9 (after reminding the people of the heart of the law, chapters 5-6), and therefore His people are required to respond with obedience to His commands. When the Israelites were finally settled in Canaan, God renewed His covenant with them; Joshua's injunction was again that they serve the Lord in sincerity and faithfulness (Josh 24:14). Similarly, Samuel recounted God's faithfulness and then demanded of the people that they serve Him faithfully with all their heart (1 Sam 12:24).

Righteousness And Uprightness

Faithfulness is linked with terms "righteousness", "uprightness", "sincerity", "with all your heart" and when the human response to God is described. Human loyalty to God is plainly not a gracious act but rather a dutiful response. The "way of faithfulness" is the law of God (Ps 119:30). The commands of God are to be performed in faithfulness and uprightness (Ps 111:8), and disputed cases are to be judged in faithfulness (2 Chron 19:9).

God makes His claim upon both the dispositions and the actions of mankind; He claims a total response of faithfulness. Such faithfulness brings reward. David said to Saul, "The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam 26:23 NIV); the faithful are preserved (Ps 31:23-24). In Ezra's great confession he recites God's call to Abraham, Abraham's response of faithfulness, the promise of land, and its fulfillment (Neh 9:8). Thus faithfulness brings the fulfillment of God's promises. David asks for vindication on the grounds that he has walked in faithfulness to God (Ps 26:3), and Hezekiah protests God's decision with the claim that he has walked before Him "in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and ... done what is good in thy sight" (Isa 38:3; cf. 2 Kings 20:3; 2 Chron 31:20). It is clear, then, that faithfulness provides a basis of appeal before God.

The relation of faithfulness to both the law and the fulfillment of God's promises is assumed by David when he exhorts Solomon to follow the Mosaic law lest national ruin follow, and to be faithful to God so that his reign will be blessed (1 Kings 2:4). It is in the context of this

admonition that Solomon, seeing its truth in God's blessing upon his father David, asks for wisdom (1 Kings 3:6).

But human beings are not faithful. God's faithfulness frequently stands in contrast to the unfaithfulness of men. "He has dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly" (Neh 9:33; cf. Ps 78:8; cf. also 2 Tim 2:13 and Rom 3:3 in the NT). Of this the psalmists lament and the prophets complain. Deut 32:20 sees idolatry as lack of faithfulness, while Hosea cites "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds" as evidence of a lack of faithfulness to God (Hos 4:1; cf. Ps 12:1). Faithfulness to God's covenant entails, of course, the prohibition of idolatry; but beyond that what is required is not cultic purity so much as justice to, and care for, the neighbor.

Steadfast Love

When man's faithfulness to man is considered, faithfulness, as a human virtue, is typically joined with steadfast love. The spies tell Rahab they will deal with her "kindly" and "faith-fully" (Josh 2:14). The wise man exhorts his son, "Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (Prov 3:3). Human beings ought to form their characters toward steadfast love and faithfulness. These human virtues do good (Prov 14:22) and cover evil (16:6); their effects in conduct are what God delights in (12:22).

But faithfulness is a virtue for other roles as well. Being counted faithful is reason for appointment to roles in Neh 7:2 (charge over Jerusalem) and 13:13 (treasurer of the storehouse). Faithfulness here is role-relative; the priests, e.g., are faithful "in keeping themselves holy" (2 Chron 31:18). Social expectations are attached to these roles, creating a kind of covenant, and thereby creating role obligations that must be met out of loyalty to the covenant.

The NT also refers to faithfulness as a human virtue. In Gal 5:22, e.g., it is listed in a catalog of virtues. Here, too, it is a virtue relative to roles, a firm loyalty to the bond created by role expectations. In 1 Tim 3:11 women are exhorted to be "faithful in all things," that is, to fulfil the role obligations of women. It is used thus in Matthew's and Luke's references to faithful servants and faithful stewards (Matt 24:45; 25:21,23; Luke 12:42; 16:10-12; 19:17). "Faithful" here is very much role-relative; but the point of the parables is not that the Christian should allow role expectations to determine totally his or her behavior, but that one be faithful to God and give that loyalty precedence over all others.

Faithfulness is applied to the roles of witness and minister (Tychichus, Eph 6:21 and Col 4:7; Epaphras, Col 1:7). Paul gives as the reason for his appointment to his role, Christ's judgment that he was faithful (1 Tim 1:12). Timothy is told to find faithful men and to appoint them to the role of teachers in the Church (2 Tim 2:2). But in all these cases such faithfulness in a role meshes with faithfulness to the Lord, as can be seen by the frequent addition of a phrase such as "in Jesus Christ."

Faithfulness In Calling

God wants us to be faithful in our calling – divine assignment. There are some people God has sent you to serve in life, God wants you to be faithful in doing that which he has called you to do (Matt 24:45-47). One of the reasons God demands faithfulness from you is that "the devil will put some of you in prison to test you" (Rev 2:10). God says you should be faithful, even to the point of death, so that He will give you the crown of life (Rev 2:10).

Moses spoke of his faithfulness unto God in this manner, "I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight (2 Sam 22:22-25).

Elijah expressed his faithfulness in this way, "He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10).

Job openly expressed his faithfulness to God in spite of all his suffering and mockery from even his own wife, ""Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (Job 1:21-22). Things were so bad to the extent that his wife charged, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But Job full of the Spirit replied, "*You are talking like a foolish woman.* Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said"

King Hezekiah was so faithful to the point that he adjudged himself qualified to receive recompense from God, and charged as follows: "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly" (2 Kings 20:2-3).

Daniel withstood the test of time by being faithful to his maker, even to the admiration of two Babylonian kings who bent and worship his God in the way no king of Israel had ever done. The devil locked him up in the lions den because he refused to bow down to Babylonians graven images, but being faithful to his maker spared his life (Dan 6:16-23).

Chapter 7: One - Tenth

Tithing is the practice of giving a tenth of one's income or property as an offering to God. The custom of paying a tithe was an ancient practice found among many nations of the ancient world. In the Ancient Near East, many ancient cultures practiced tithing in some form. Israel was merely one among many ancient Near Eastern peoples who tithed their property, produce, or currency. Egyptians practiced tithing, as did Syrians, Babylonians, and Assyrians.

The practice of giving a tenth of income or property extends into Hebrew history before the time of the Mosaic Law. The first recorded instance of tithing in the Bible occurs in Gen 14:17-20. After returning from rescuing Lot and defeating his enemies, Abraham met Melchizedek, the "king of Salem" and "priest of God Most High." The text states simply that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the goods he had obtained in battle.

Jacob after his Bethel vision vowed a tenth of all that God gave him, should God be with and keep him, and give him bread and raiment, and bring him again to his father's house in peace (Gen 28:20-22). The Law of Moses prescribed tithing in some detail. Lev 27:30-32 stated that the tithe of the land would include the seed of the land and the fruit of the tree. In addition the Hebrew people were required to set apart every tenth animal of their herds and flocks to the Lord.

Mosaic legislation on tithing is also found in two other passages. Num 18:21-32 stated that the tithes in Israel would be given to the Levites, because the Levites did not receive a land inheritance like the other tribes of Israel. The Levites, in turn, were to offer a heave offering to the Lord. This would constitute a tithe on their part of the goods which they received. The rest of the goods which the Levites received would provide their living as the reward for their work in the tabernacle. There is no mention of a tithe in Exodus but only the giving of the FIRSTFRUITS (Ezek 44:29-30).

Finally, prophet Malachi indicated that Israel had robbed God in withholding tithes and offerings. Malachi (Mal 3:10) said God promises to "open heaven's windows and pour out a blessing" so that there would be no "room to receive it," provided the people by bringing in all the tithes would put Him to the proof as to keeping His word. Thus the Israelites were exhorted to bring their tithes into the storehouse in order to enjoy the Lord's blessing (Mal 3:8-12).

Again, the purpose of the giving of a tenth in the Old Testament was to meet the material need of the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless (the orphan), and the widow (Deut 26:12-13). The tithe was an expression of gratitude to God by His people. Basic to tithing was the acknowledgment of God's ownership of everything in the earth.

In the New Testament the words tithe and tithing appear only eight times (Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12; Heb 7:5-6,8-9). All of these passages refer to Old Testament usage and to current Jewish practice. Nowhere does the New Testament expressly command Christians to tithe. Christians, whose privileges are so much greater and to whom heaven is opened by Christ's death and ascension, should at least offer no less a proportion of all their income to the Lord's cause than did the Israelite: we should not lose but even in this world gain thereby (Prov 3:9-10).

However, as believers we are to be generous in sharing our material possessions with the poor and for the support of Christian ministry. Christ Himself is our model in giving. Giving is to be voluntary, willing, cheerful, and given in the light of our accountability to God. Giving should be systematic and by no means limited to a tithe of our incomes. We recognize that all we have is from God. We are called to be faithful stewards of all our possessions (Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 9:3-14; 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15).

Goods Subject To The Tithe

Typically in the ancient Near East the tithe was taken from a broad range of property, produce, or even currency, but particulars varied from culture to culture. Among property items that were tithed in Israel are listed grain, new wine, olive oil, fruit, cattle, and sheep (Deut 14:23; Lev 27:32; etc.), but other items were probably tithed as well. Abram tithed the spoils of battle (Gen 14:20), and Jacob vowed to tithe all that God gave him (28:22). Throughout the ancient Near East all kinds of objects have been found designated as subject to the tithe: wool, cloth, wood, weapons, gold, silver, donkeys, etc. In general, the Israelites were to tithe all of the wealth of the land that Yahweh gave to them (Deut 8:18).

Theological Implications

No institution in Israel, including tithing, existed merely to carry out a political, economic, or humanitarian function. By giving the tithe the Israelites were declaring solemnly that they were giving a portion back to the Lord who had prospered them (cf. Deut 26:10-15). By giving the tithe they also recognized the validity of the priests' and Levites' role as God's representatives and acknowledged their right to receive support for the spiritual service they performed on the people's behalf.

The tithe ritual afforded the Israelites an opportunity to remember Yahweh's blessings as He had remembered them, and to imitate their God's care for slaves, the poor, orphans, and widows. The tithe demanded that the Israelites serve their God at a significant cost to themselves. In this amazing system of tithing, Israel's economics became a channel for expressing love to God and love to neighbors.

Finally, tithing helped to set Israel apart as Yahweh's people and His alone, a people holy to Him (Deut 14:22-29). Only a holy people could be blessed (v. 29), and the blessing was to reinforce Israel's reverence for Yahweh and sense of belonging to Him. By tithing, therefore, the Israelites fulfilled the desire of their ancestor Jacob: "the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee" (Gen 28:21).

New Testament Perspectives

Several New Testament passages refer to tithing, and 2 Cor 9:7-13 alludes to the practice although it does not specifically mention it. In Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12 the giving of tithes is cast in a negative light because of the way that it was often practiced with no regard for justice, the love of God, mercy, and faith. Deuteronomy emphasizes the necessity of all virtues as the context in which the tithe is given (see esp. Deut 14:22-29). By Jesus' time the Pharisees had legalized the whole affair, and Jesus denounced them for paying attention to tithe only while ignoring the real issue of a *pleasing moral life before God* (Matt 23:23 par Luke 11:42).

Paul's exhortation to give with a cheerful heart (2 Cor 9:7) reflects Deuteronomy's instruction about tithing - emphasizes the importance of rejoicing (Deut 12:7, 11, 17).

Chapter 8: Tangible Giving

Giving is one of the things God wants us to put into practice if we surely want to make heaven. Beloved, just as we have goods (tangible) and services (intangible) in commerce and economics, Giving can also be classified into tangible and intangible. The tangible aspect being giving that is physical and can be felt while the intangible giving is that which will demonstrate through service to God and humanity.

What Is Tangible Giving

Giving means volitional transference of a thing or benefit from one to another. In the Old Testament the concept of giving is significant and multifaceted. The model is God Himself who is ever giving generously of Himself and His own bounty. The land of promise, the covenants, peace, power, justice, deliverance from the enemy, the phenomena of nature, provision, and sustenance are but some of the many gifts that the Old Testament attributes to God's own gracious giving.

The NT particularly accents God's giving nature. In John's Gospel Jesus' own works (5:36) are attributed to God's giving. Indeed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (3:16), and the Father "has given all things into his [the Son's] hand" (3:35). Jesus Himself taught the maxim that it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), thereby extending to the sphere of human relations the divine example of giving freely of oneself for the well-being of others. Giving should not be construed in terms of "external magnitude" but on the basis of "the internal state of the giver's heart" Consonant with divine giving is the "new commandment" that Jesus gives his followers in John 13:34, "even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Rules For Giving

Jesus gave us instruction on rules we should observe when giving alms to anyone in need, "when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matt 6:2-4). Many people in the world today don't like to give to the needy. Some will do it occasionally only to show off. Jesus said such motive of giving is not right. Paul instructed the Galatians' churches to set aside a sum of money from collection of God's people (1 Cor 16:1-2). Paul went further to say that when one gives by willingness; the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have (2 Cor 8:11-12). Paul admonishes that we sow generously without grudge or compulsion (2 Cor 9:6-8). Some would want to hold a committee before they will give to somebody God is leading them to help. Most times, such consultation will prevent the help from getting to that needy person. Again, I detest the use of the word help when rendering assistance to the needy. When you assist the needy, don't blow your trumpet that you helped him, you were only performing that which is your duty to do. Giving can manifest in the form of: giving to the poor, to God's work, giving as praise, and offerings.

Should I Be My Brother's Keeper?

Many people's attitude towards giving to the needy today is like they are asking God like Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). Their action towards the needy ones is tantamount to Cain's slaying of his brother Abel. When we look around and imagine the things that are happening in the world today, it is quite clear to us all, that there is little or no love among ourselves. People do terrible things to each other due to sin, hatred and jealousy.

One of the ways God expects us to be our brother's keeper is by practicing Hospitality and giving without grumbling (1Pet 4:9). Hospitality means (of a person) pleased to welcome guests, generous and friendly to visitors. Hospitality is a subset of the great commandment: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 19:19). As a child, I did not know what hospitality was then, but I used to see my father vacate his apartment for visitors, including Missionaries, hosting them for days, weeks and months. I did remember, on the 9th of March 2006 at about 10.35am, I had a knowing that I should write on Hospitality and Giving, and I yielded to the Holy Spirit.

Are you a lover of hospitality? Do you give generously to the poor? To what degree do you welcome guests? Are you generous and friendly to visitors and people around you? The spirit of truth will give you understanding (Jn 16:13).

Peoples' Attitude To Giving And Hospitality

Christians and non-Christians share common attitude towards hospitality and giving. This attitude can be explained using Jesus' parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Lk 10:25-35). Many people are like the Priest and the Levite, who refused to show mercy on that man who fell among Thieves, wounded and left half dead. They are selfish. Only very few people are like the Good Samaritan, who had pity on the wounded man, took care of him and was even willing to owe to ensure that he regained his health.

Imagine the Samaritan- a victim of racial discrimination, having compassion on somebody of the tribe of Israel who disliked his race! And Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which now of these three, think you, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? The lawyer answered, "He that showed mercy on him" Then Jesus said, "Go and do likewise". Today, many people believe that certain people are to be shunned. They sit on their own possessions. They discriminate the poor and the needy. Some refused to give hospitality or helps to people that belong to other denominations. Some people reject hospitality due to fear of evil attacks by false guests or dubious person. A few saw such helps as parasitic and not symbiotic. They want to give only to those who can reward them immediately. Some Christians are not given to hospitality because they are born of water but not of the spirit, and as such are not spirit-filled (Jn 3:5). Some refused on the ground of disagreement in their matrimonial home about the hospitality or help they were about to render to somebody in need.

Benefit of Hospitality and Giving

The book of Hebrew states, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertain angels unawares" (Heb 13:2). This means Hospitality and Giving are blessings in disguise. Hospitality and Giving have the indwelling spirit of Melchizedek who blessed Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel. This spirit has the superior power to bless every Giver (Heb 7:7). Hospitality and giving are put in place to bless the giver, "You are unto this called that you should inherit a blessing (1Pet 3:8,9). Christ said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy (Matt 5:7).

A truthful giver of hospitality will be judged by Christ and make Heaven (Matt 25:34). Other benefits enjoyed by giver of hospitality and alms are divine protection, special favour, wisdom, etc. Through hospitality and kindness, Abraham begat Isaac (Gen 18:10), Lot and Rahab families were spared (Gen 19:22, Josh 6:25), Moses got married to Zipporah (Ex 2:21), Publius' father got healed (Act 28:8), etc. Christ gave the visiting wise men joy, and they recompense him by presenting gifts unto him, Jesus being their host (Matt 2:11). The chief Butler recompensed Joseph by telling Pharaoh about him (Gen 41:9).

God's favour hover around givers of hospitality, as such, they receive whatever they ask from him in the name of Jesus. Intercessory prayers, offered by recipient of hospitality at departure, to the givers received automatic answers. Moreover, givers of hospitality have sweet fellowship with the Holy Spirit and angels minister unto them at will. They manifest the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Dangers of Not Doing Hospitality and Giving

People who are not given to hospitality are in darkness and will stumble (1Jn 2:9). They are murderers. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1Jn 3:15). They do not have the love of God in them. "Whosoever has this world goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his heart of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him? (1Jn 3:17). Opportunities for greatness will elude them because they will lack vision (Hos 4:6). They will miss heaven (2Jn 8).

Those that are not given to hospitality have their peace replaced with calamities and self-destruction. "The way of the ungodly shall perish" (Ps 1:6). In the book of Judges, Chapters 19 and 20, the Benjamites breached hospitality, when sons of Belial (the wicked men) molested the concubine of a Levite who was granted hospitality by an Ephraim man in Gibeah, when no other person was ready to give them hospitality in that city. The death of this concubine made the eleven tribes of Israel fight against the Benjamites, killing many, and destroying cities.

Who Should I Give Hospitality And Helps?

There are those that are honestly in need of hospitality or helps, but there are also false guests. Hence there is need to tackle the mounting problems of hospitality and giving. The Bible says "Believe not every spirit but test the spirit whether they are of God (1Jn 4:1). Love and discernment should be used by believers to know whom to accept and support, and whom to resist. John warned, "Do faithfully whatsoever you do for the brethren, and for strangers" (3Jn 5).

However, Christ expects us to give hospitality and helps to all (Jn 13:34-35). The love of Christ constraint us to love our enemies (Matt 5:44, 2Cor 5:14). Reject the spirit of Diotrephes (3Jn 10).

Awhile ago, some Christians saw me giving alms and were discouraging me, telling me that I could be harmed by the recipient, but they failed to tell me that I will miss heaven by not doing so.

Be careful when denying hospitality or helps due to discernment. Your judgment may be wrong (Zech 7:9). Your senses may not be exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb 5:14). You may not have the gift of discerning of spirits (1Cor 12:10). Your timing may be wrong (Lk 12:56). You may not have an understanding heart like King Solomon (1Kg 3:9).

Therefore, give hospitality and helps to all. For Jesus visited and ate with sinners. “Who is he that will harm you? (1Pet 3:14). “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (1Jn 4:4). The angels that spared Lot, Isaac, Rahab and the prophets will protect you (Ex 23:20).

On the rare afflictions arising from hospitality and rendering of helps, the Bible says: “If any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1Pet 4:16). He should rejoice for the crown of righteousness is laid up for him (2Tim 4:8).

How Can I Practice Hospitality and Giving?

Let the love of God and that of your neighbour be the rule of thumb. Be humble and submissive when giving hospitality and helps to the needy (Gen 18:2, Gen 19:1, Gen 24:31). Be eager to give hospitality or help to the needy. (Lk 19:6, Ac 16:15). Mordecai ensured that Hadassah became Queen (Est 2:11). Show concern for the needy, and give hospitality without grumbling (1Pet 4:9). Live for the poor (Neh 5:11,13; 2Sam 17:27-29). Give hospitality without expecting direct reward, you are an unprofitable servant (Lk 17:10). Samuel did so much for Saul for free. Barzillai exclaimed, “Why should the king recompense me with such reward? (2Sam 19:36). Feed the poor (Lk 14:13-14). Agree with your spouse to give hospitality and helps to the needy (2Kg 4:10). Give hospitality or helps to people without considering their denomination, for Christ is not divided (1Cor 1:12). Give according to how God has empowered you (Lk 6:38). Assist morally, financially, materially and spiritually those you come in contact with. Render helps when convenient and not convenient. Be a true disciple of Christ (Ac 11:29). Welcome guests readily, help the needy, and avoid discouraging others from doing same.

Amend Your Ways and Be In Christ

“The poor shall never cease out of the land, open your hand wide unto the needy” (Deut 15:11). “Tekel: You are weighed in the balance and are found wanting” (Dan 5:27). Jesus said to the rich man, “Yet you lack one thing: helping the needy” (Lk 18:22).

Dear friends, think about all that you stand to lose by not helping the needy and the poor. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev 3:19). Begin to live a spirit-filled life and emulate Christ by practicing hospitality and helping the poor and the needy. I charge you “Go and sin no more” (Jn 8:11).

Notable Givers In The Bible

Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus told Jesus, “Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8-10). Zacchaeus’ statement reminded us that we should refrain ourselves from cheating people. Cheating here is presented as an act that can hinder our heavenly deposit. We must live our lives by adding value to others, not robbing people of what God has given them. When Jesus saw the giving attitude of Zacchaeus, referring to him, Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Your giving reinstates your sonship to father Abraham. What can you remember quickly concerning Abraham? The name Abraham is synonymous to God’s unlimited blessing. So, when you give cheerfully, Abraham blessings become yours.

Dorcas

Dorcas a woman, also known as Tabitha was well known for doing good always and helping the poor (Acts 9:36). She was reported to have used her life to bless widows in her days. Of course, when she died before her time God orchestrated Peter to where her remain was laid. To Peter's surprise, he found "widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas has made while she was still with them". You can imagine the huge amount of money and time Dorcas has invested in the life of these widows. That is the kind of life God want us to live.

You may not have money to give to me to take me out of a predicament, but if you are willing to help, God will deposit some ideas in your spirit which when you share it with me, and I act upon it, the idea will jet me out of such predicament. How about giving referrals to me, I mean recommending somewhere or somebody of value to me through which I can get help. In those ways, you have done Christ for me. You can also advocate for me: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Prov 31:8-9).

I tell you, presently, I may not have what it takes to meet the Governor, or the president of my country for assistance. God might have giving you free access to this set of people, why not lay your own problem aside when you get to them and table my matter first, and see whether God will not in turn miraculously bless you more than you can ever imagine.

Cornelius

Cornelius was a Roman army officer, "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He lived for the poor; "he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (Acts 10:2). He was so committed to giving alms that God decided to break known protocol and extend salvation initially reserved for the Jews to him a Gentile through Peter. Yes, the children food was given to the dogs. So you see, your giving can move God to go the extra mile of blessing you beyond your limited imagination.

The Bible says as Peter was delivering God's message to Cornelius family, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message...Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:44, 47, and 48). God knew that if He fails to use the Holy Spirit to manifest that way, but passed through Peter to say to his fellow Jews that made the Journey with him, that the Holy Spirit said he should baptized the Gentiles, they would overrule the move of God.

The conversion of Cornelius household and the total baptism caused a rift among the elders in Jerusalem, "the apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them"(Acts 11:1-3). They taught God is only the God of physical circumcision, they never knew that He is also the God of spiritual circumcision. Moreover they lost memory of what Jesus told them while he was on earth that "other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice" (John 10:16).

The Early Christians

Now, let refresh ourselves again concerning the attitude of the early Christians towards giving. In Acts 2:44-45, we were told that "All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” We were told that, “There were no needy persons among them”. Why? “For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need”(Acts 4:34-35). An example was given of Barnabas who sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).

Giving among the early Christians included materials such as food items not only money. The following scripture confirmed this: “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). Giving to the needy must be according to individual ability not by leverage, “The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30).

Paul made us to understand that distance should not serve as hindrance when God leads you to bless somebody with some of the blessings he has endowed you with: "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings” (Acts 24:17). Paul also said that material blessings should be shared among believers in similar fashion as believers shared spiritual blessings in the church, “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Rom 15:27).

People are also encouraged to give because at a point in future they will find themselves in situations where they also need help from people or the society they belong. Sister Phoebe was in such a situation, and Paul spoke for her as follows:”I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many and especially to me” (Rom 16:1-2).”

Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have enough so they can share with you when you have need. In this way, there will be communal relationship where things are shared according to individual needs” (2 Cor 8:14).

Let your heart yearn to give so that God will be drawn to you when you need help. Paul and his team were not eager to visit Macedonia, but their heart of giving reached for heaven and God orchestrated Paul to be a blessing to them, even against his will. That’s what giving will do for you.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:6-10).

Beloved, ask for the giving grace that surpasses that of Macedonian churches. “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” (2 Cor 8:1-3). Let your giving steer up others to give to those in need around them, “For I know your eagerness

to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action” (2 Cor 9:1-2).

Giving is a deed that God cherished so much and is willing to reward you speedily, “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Heb 6:10).

Note: All through this chapter, I have dealt majorly on the Tangible aspect of giving. For convenience sake, Intangible Giving which dealt with serving God through humanity, and grows individuals to the journey of significance in life, has been packaged in my special book titled: “Living Beyond Yourself”.

Heaven, Here I Come!

Justice, mercy, faithfulness, and giving are all part of His nature. God has unequalled affinity in giving. He demonstrated this by sending His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to the world to enable us find our way back to Him.

“The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Ps145:8-9).

Love is give and take. It proceeded from God first. For “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (1 John 3:16-19).

This is your moment of decision. You've got to live like Christ from now on. You want God to be gracious to you, show you unmerited favour at Christ expense, then be gracious unto others. You want God to have compassion on you? Then, be regularly moved by your heart of compassion to help those who need help, and those who need help but don't want help. That is empathy and love. Have self-control. As God tender mercies are over all His works, let the sure mercies of David: the mercy of forgiveness and mercy of healing manifest through your spirit man. For Christ said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

It is not God's will that you miss heaven on the last day. So you've got to make haste now that you're still alive to walk out your own salvation with trembling. Tomorrow may be too late. Confess your sins to the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent from your sins. Tell him to be your Lord and Saviour. Get baptized in water and in the Holy Ghost. Enroll into a spiritual maturity class to grow in the Word of God, Prayer, fellowship, tithing and giving, and live out the teachings in this book and live like Christ.

As you get saved, think on these things: true fasting, pure worship, the weightier matters, and bear fruit worthy of repentance. Lean on Jesus and ask Holy Spirit to help you.

I trust the Lord helping you, in Jesus name.

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Parting Note On: 'How to Make Heaven'

The book '**How to make heaven**' is one out of my four books in the series I called: 'Glorious Eternity Series': The four books are:

1. How to make heaven: Eliminating caricature, making the path straight
2. How to break the yoke of life: Finding your way to freedom, health, wealth and fulfillment

3. Church without God: Exploit the truth and purge yourself in the faith
4. Living beyond yourself: How to navigate into success and significance

The totality of these books summed up my complete work on "How to make heaven". Each of the books can be purchased and read independently.

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About the Author

I am the author of the best-selling book: “How to discover your divine destiny and total breakthroughs”. I spent 16 years working as an Engineer in the Oil and Gas industry before I was divinely conscripted into my divine assignment. I am an author, international speaker, counselor, destiny mentor, business and wellness coach. My specialties are hidden truths, divine assignment, justice, success and leadership.

I run workshops to help people discover their destiny, the unique business God created them to do, how to start and succeed. I also counsel individuals empathetically on issues relating to destiny, employment, health, relationships, and many more, using the awesome power inherent in their destiny, and assist many to become writers and self – publish many books.

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