



Freedom
from
Religious
Bondage

Edison Macusi

Freedom from *Religious Bondage* **Finding freedom in the House of the Lord**

Edison Macusi

True religion is the practice of the presence of God in one's life. There is no greater demonstration of faith than a man who walks with God in the good times and even in the bad times; a man tempered by trials, strengthened by His grace and devoted to humility. But what happens when religion has become a byword for an institution rather than a walk of faith or a pilgrimage with God? In this book you will learn how to walk with faith, overcome religiosity and be set free to live the abundant life God has called you for.

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”
Gal. 5:1 (NASB)

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PREFACE

Religion dominated the world since the middle Ages. It controlled kingdoms and governance, as well as its decrees could bring fear and panic not just to the ruling monarchs but even to the least of the peasants. People can become religious for so many reasons. But a true religion who has it? In this book we will explore together how the bondage of false religion can actually oppress man and release the beast within him. In these last days we will also witness God's increasing display of His healing love not just to the physically afflicted but even those tormented within their bodies and emotions. Freedom is the cry of every human heart. Religious bondage can be the cruelest form of oppression a man can undergo. It releases the beast within every human being and unleashes all unholy desires.

In our country, many people are led to believe that every sect and every form of religion leads to the same God we worship. They promise joy, freedom from misery and poverty. Yet, they minister law and death, if not sacrilege to the person of Truth and Love. They claim to be free...and yet their lives show increasing bondage.

True freedom comes from the heart. A man set free from religious bondage will walk in truth and power that can shake this world like Paul the apostle did. If we claim to be free...we will be as free as the birds flying in the air. What they have is a simple faith, that every day is a new day and that God will not

forget them. This faith only comes from deep within, when one has been set free. Jesus came not just to seek the lost but also to set free even those bound by false religion. He came to bring life and release freedom to the captives.

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Chapter 1

A Journey to Freedom

The life of Abraham points to us a poignant example of what God can do to a man willingly given to Him. Abraham was never a perfect man, but his faith and patience in the Lord won him the title, “A friend of God”. The account of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 declares of the man,

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Heb 11:8-10)

To Abraham, when the Lord knocks, he simply yields and opens up his heart before Him. He willingly obeyed the voice of God, His nudging. In the Scriptures it says, “he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb 11:8). Freedom to most of us is feeling free, feeling we can do everything we want. My former teacher wisely commented about this, “Your freedom ends, when the freedom of another is in jeopardy”. I thought before that freedom is mainly being free from imprisonment. So when I went to study in college, I carried

that definition not until I met some radicals in the University of the Philippines whose definition starkly contrasted mine. They thought freedom means freedom from all restraint in the global community; freedom from capitalism; freedom from imperialism. Freedom thus means many to different people, but the best form of freedom is being set free from inner oppressions one has struggled with for many years.

My experience in UPLB

College years can be the best or the worst years of one's life depending on how you spend it. In our college, invitations from different organizations flooded my pocket from fraternities to academic organizations and to Christian ministries. Each one tried to convince me of their mission and vision, their ways and traditions to persuade me to join their ranks and make a difference in the society. One of these organizations is the League of Filipino Students who ardently invites all freshmen who are willing to fight for the country's freedom from imperialism. They call us to a noble cause, to fight for freedom from oppression of the enemy which was always the United States. One time while in the corridor of our dormitory one student asked me to join their organization, I flatly refused. My refusal was not because I love imperialism but because I know that beyond the veil of all other "isms" that we observe here in our society, the root is not found in cutting off imperialism. My inkling was, if we fight against imperialism, we indeed fight for a noble cause, yet this was just a symptom of what had gone wrong. People can impose their right on others or gobble their business because they

have more money. And we can continue to denounce that indeed imperialism and capitalism can be evil; but more than flailing at the branches, I thought, the best was to remove the root of all evil which is sin permeating the society. The greatest radicals this world had ever known will not be Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin or Mao Tse Tung...rather, it would be the ones who had and who continue to cut off the root of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They would be the most humble and noble souls this world has ever known. They won't be found sitting in King's Palaces or enjoying the luxury of a vacation in the Mediterranean or in the Bahamas but will be found working in the most humble and destitute areas of this world showing forth the love of their Captain and Master. The journey to freedom is thus the journey of cutting off the influence of this tree in one's life, in one's neighbors and in one's country. This is the journey I have chosen and would choose to remain. This was also the journey which the patriarch Abraham chose to walk when God called him from his birthplace to Canaan.

Abraham's journey

Abraham was of a different spirit. When God spoke to him while still living with his father's house and under the comforts of his relatives, he chose to obey God.

“Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make

your name great; And so you shall be a blessing.” (Gen 12:1-2)

Previous to this, the Lord confounded the language of the world (Gen 11:7) as the people wanted to build a skyscraper that reaches to the abode of God. They wanted to reach God according to their own chosen method. These people were blinded by the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4) and thought they could reach Heaven by their own chosen ways. Isn't this familiar? We want to be independent from the dictates of anyone? We want a kingdom of our own, a city we can call with our own names. And even in the ancient of times such as in the land of Shinar or Babylon, people haven't been any different from us. They are just as stubborn and hard headed.

This was the world where Abraham hails from. It is a world which was already divided in language, culture and practice as a result of trying to reach God by their own ways. In the Philippines and in many Asian cultures, the nuclear family and the extended family are very cohesive. Most of the new couples would still be found living with their families. This is cultural and I do not mean it is evil to be found near your families. The Bible tells us that Abraham lived close to his family. There are advantages and disadvantages of living close to your extended families. I can cite three main advantages: immediate help and advices during the pregnancy of your wife, care when the baby is born and care during sickness. Thus it brings comfort and help to many start up families. The disadvantages can be as compelling as the advantages:

problems with *in-laws*, a mentality of dependence and inability to decide on your own course. This could be the main reason why the Lord wants a newly married couple to separate.

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen 2:24)

The meaning of leaving here is physical, financial and spiritual. A man or a husband is commanded to leave his family and the command has been as direct and blunt as much as possible. Other words for *leave* are: cut off, leave behind, keep behind, abandon, forsake and pass by. We are thus commanded to be cut off from our very own umbilical cords of nurturance and dependence to our families when we build our own families. We are called to do this in order to facilitate the cleaving and the one-flesh in a husband and wife relationship. This presupposes that all the other advantages of remaining in an extended family are subordinate to the cleaving between a husband and wife. Moreover this gives freedom for the newlywed to define and pattern their own families after an image they like. Living with in-laws can make this hard with probably many unsolicited advices coming from one’s parents. In the days of Abraham, it was not any different.

If the Lord Jesus Christ has repeated the same commands from the Old Testament, saying we are to leave our families and cleave to our wives, it probably is because it is important. In the case of Abraham, this was to free him for his calling.

The Lord called him and said:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3)

Leaving one's family – your father and mother or brothers and sisters to live for the call the Lord called you is a bold step of faith. Would you rather give up your comfort zone or stand up and listen to the voice of God? Uncertainties abound and questions like, "what's my future there? Who will help me in that land? How about my present properties here? Yet, Abraham did not give in to such fabled questions. With all his might and will, he composed himself and set forth for a journey. Abraham left all to get what he cannot lose.

Abraham started a journey that would bring him into a land he had never been or had never seen; he willingly obeyed the voice of God whom probably is as strange to him as the call to move out of his birthplace. God is as strange as anybody can be when one has never heard of Him. Basing on the Scriptural records, it is possible that Abraham could have known God by way of oral traditions coming from records of his ancestors. And indeed he traces back his ancestry to

Noah's son, Shem. He is the 8th generation of a godly line. One of the best characteristics Abraham has was to not reject outrightly what God was saying to him, nor to doubt His voice. He could have inquire from his father Terah if there were records of hearing God in the past. Thus was Abraham, the friend of God, because he willingly obeyed and put to risk his own life, status and image in order to obey the voice of God.

The command to leave one's family was never easy. One will always feel a foreigner when one goes to a new territory. Yet it did not scare Abraham one bit. Not once was it mentioned that he shirked from this call to move to an unknown land...away from civilization, away from a vibrant city life, away from the center of the civilized world. The move of Abraham can be compared from being situated in a bustling metropolis like Manila and then moving to a backward province. Based on the commands given to Abraham, it would seem that the call was previously given to Terah but he did not persevere to follow it. Terah took Abram, Sarai and Lot together from the City of Ur towards Canaan but get distracted and settled in Haran rather than in Canaan. If you will get a map and measure the distance between the city of Haran and Canaan, the distance to go is still 250 kilometers; you still have to cross the Euphrates River and overcome the sand dunes covering some areas of Canaan until you get into the fertile areas.

“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of

Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.” (Gen 11:31-32)



Abraham's journey to Canaan (Source: "Abraham." Encyclopædia Britannica. [Ultimate Reference Suite](#). Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009.BDEA/G. Dagli Orti/DeAgostini Picture Library)

The Lord could have placed in the heart of Terah the call to move out his family from Ur to Canaan. Unfortunately he died not having seen the land the Lord has called them to settle in. Like Terah, there are many among us whose dreams are unfulfilled and simply left out because we did not reach

forth to walk the destiny we were called to walk forth. Terah was originally called to bring his family to Canaan but stopped short at Haran. Today in our journey we can be stopped short by any baggage we claim and bring with us that are unnecessary. Baggage can contain the things we just need in our travel but when we travel with unnecessary weight, it can slow us down. Or it can totally keep us away from our goal. One of these oppressing spirits is the spirit of religion and entertainment.

Terah could have been the first friend of God had he not settle down in Haran and obeyed God completely to move his family to Canaan. God has been preparing a godly line by which the Jews would come and bless the world with the oracles of God and His Messiah. In order to accomplish this, the Lord looked for a man who would exactly fulfill and love what He desired to do. A man that is after His own heart and mind, a man who would persevere to believe Him even when things and situations look bleak.

Nevertheless, the vision did not die with Terah but again and again, the Lord reminded Abraham not to settle down in any place but Canaan. “Abram, come and get out of your country”, the Lord would have ask him; come out from among your relatives, your friends, your family. Like Abraham, the Lord has called us to a place of Freedom. This place is Freedom not because we have the license to commit sin, but rather because we are freed to be the servants of God. The call to this place starts with God inviting us, summoning us and

calling us “to come out from among the unbelieving”. We started our journey the moment we believed in Him.

"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. (2 Co 6:17)

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev 3:20)

There were many lessons from Abraham’s journey which can parallel our walk with God. He was a believer and seeker of God, tender hearted and obedient. One can ask three main questions with this journey of Abraham. Why would God require a man to travel to an unknown place? What was the point of travelling? Why would he need to leave his family? What was the call? These questions beg answers worth learning and reading.

Test of faith

Abraham is one of the heroes of faith not merely because he was the progenitor of Israel but because of his willingness to move and believe what God requires of him. He believed even when things look impossible or when things do not seem to correspond together. The place of travel was not as important as the process and the experience of travel. Abraham’s journey

take us from Ur to Haran and then to Canaan; it tells the story of an amazing partnership between a family who was willing to believe in a God who was so willing to protect and empower a servant and friend of His. He grew in faith because He obeyed what God has said. He confessed he does not know where he was going but in all of these uncertainties, He simply obeyed to get out and move to the direction of where Canaan was. In fact this was the main reason we revere him...he believed even before he saw the Land.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Heb 11:8)

“For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Rom 4:3)

Inheritance

“And I will make you a great nation...” (Gen 12:2)

“Obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance...” (Heb 11:8)

It is the Lord who called him to be the father of a great nation and this movement to the land of Canaan was a move to get his inheritance from the Lord. How many among us would be willing to do just that? To leave your comfort zone and move

to God's obscure place of freedom? Many among us would consider twice before moving to another land when we are already planted to a place of convenience. Abraham's move can be comparable to a doctor living in the United States and moving back to a backward nation in Africa. And yet he did not resist God. He trusted the Lord uncompromisingly; his composure was simple, if he would follow God, then he would follow Him all the way. In a time where there were so many uncertainties and few seekers of God, Abraham was defiant and trusted the Lord fully. He showed a heartfelt obedience that few could muster. One cannot really have faith and not obey; this is double mindedness. Even today, seeking God can bring you to human courts as insane, backward and as a rebel.

Establish a leader

“Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing...” (Gen 12:1)

Abram could not have become Abraham the patriarch had the Lord simply left him alone with his relatives; God would provide the opportunity to be so. To do this, the Lord has to call him out or re-move him from his family, friends and relatives who were all comfortably located near each other. Abram could not become the leader he would be unless he be cut off from his umbilical cord. His journey to Canaan will

prove to be the school by which the Lord will train him to sharpen his leadership skills, test his patience and temper his temperaments. Every leader God established have been tested and He continue to look upon His leaders, bring them more tests, sharpen their skills and gifts and use them for their callings in life. Alexander Solzhenitsyn correctly remarked that even, “nature knows that perpetual wellbeing is not good”.

Close knit families which are common to many Asian countries has a great disadvantage in multiplying or creating the next leaders. Often the existing clan or family will continue to rule and provide leadership for as long as they desire and the people like them. In Ur, Abraham’s family could have been just as ordinary as any common Chaldeans. The removal of Abram to a different location which perhaps he may have never before handled puts him into a position of dependence to the Lord and trains him to be obedient to His voice. Christian leadership can be similar to many military organizations; one has to get closer to the Head if one wants to learn what will be the next move. Had he stayed in Ur, he could have been a nobody...no fame, no glory a nobody. It was Abraham’s unquestioning obedience that leaves us perfectly mesmerized at such feat of faith. He had no Bible to read, no audio book to listen to about God, no computer to view the web and find about what others are tuning in from the Lord. He gets his by directly listening from Heaven where the Lord talks with him.

Father of many nations

"And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:3)

His call was never clear during the start of his journey. He simply knew he must move away from his place to a new one which he had never seen before. The call of Abraham became much clearer to him when he already got into Canaan. In fact his name was changed to reflect the nobility of his call. His name was changed from Abram to Abraham including Sarai's to Sarah being promised that they would be the father and mother of many nations reinstating the call of Adam and Eve to both. Abraham's call was to pioneer and incubate the vision that God has for His people on earth. His servant basically became the father of faith that until now we try to emulate as we serve God and his life has not stopped radiating the brilliance of his service to God on earth. We can reason out that Abraham has not as many temptations to deal with as we do...and not as many people to care with as we could think of. And yet this servant of God was justified not mainly because of the many temptations he had overcome with but because of his singular faith in the Lord. Smith Wigglesworth aptly said, "Only believe and you shall see God's miracle".

"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of

nations. "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. "And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother of nations*; kings of peoples shall come from her." (Gen 17:4-6, 15-16)

“In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.” (Rom 4:18-21)

In our quest for true freedom, faith is required to release us into our calling. Abraham was freed from the tyranny of nearsightedness to fly and see far and wide because of his obedience. Trains follow rail tracks. When we remove a rail track, a train seems to be free and continuously drive and move but gets to nowhere. Likewise our lives can be moving and seem to keep us from getting somewhere, but in order to

truly move forward, we need the freedom that a rail track can bring...the freedom to thrust forward. Our quest for true freedom comes at a price we need to pay. In order to move up, we need a partner. Abraham chose well to partner with God; this is a law we need to understand. We can be the train that is full of gasoline or electricity, but without a rail track, we get to nothing. In fact we go in circles. But when we learn to see that God can be our rail track we can move and be free to thrust forward.

A journey that lasts for a lifetime

“Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”
(Gen 12:1-4)

Coming back to Abraham, when God called him to move out of his country, he did not move out alone. Although the Lord did not specify who will go with him to Canaan, He packed his things with his father, nephew and his wife. There is a great truth we need to learn from this. Although the Lord spoke directly to Abraham, it was a blessing to note that he

also considered and told his relatives and probably friends of God's plan for them in Canaan. Not many may have agreed with him and initially it could have been his slaves, men and maid servants who accompanied his immediate family. In our journey to Freedom, it would always be a wise plan to follow suit what Abraham did. We are to bring our families with us to Freedom. Was this not what Jesus Christ refers to when He said, "in you shall all the families of the earth will be blessed?" We are called to be a blessing just as Abraham had been a blessing to all the families of the earth, producing Kings, Queens and a nation who gave the Bible to the world and a Savior that all would do well to confess they need.

Chapter 2

Obstacles to Freedom

I read that Freedom comes with a price. This was in fact the story of one man who was born as a peasant and raised by a family who would be described in today's terms as poor. In his days there was neither electricity nor machines to power daily activities. He had nothing to contend with or to switch on for a daily activity except maybe to hone a saw, cut a timber and make perfect furniture. When his time to proclaim the everlasting gospel came, the rich and the elite were offended. In fact the ones who readily believed in him were common peasants also. Yet today he is recognized as the genius who probably set-forth more than an organization and left behind a trail of life and hope. Do you know who this man was? He never went to school or formed a theological seminary or hailed from Cambridge or Harvard. And yet, his legacy lives on and his presence still felt among all people groups. This was Jesus Christ...the God-man who came to set His people free. One of the most misunderstood historical and cultural figures of history. In one instance while preaching among his own people he proclaimed:

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that

You say, 'You shall become free'?"

(Joh 8:32-33)

His people flatly refused and said...we have never been subjugated to anyone. In fact even during the times of Jesus which was also the times of the Roman emperors, Samaria and Judea were Roman provinces which have their own unique autonomy. But what was the point of Jesus telling His people freedom? We trace this back to His call just after He was baptize, He fasted for 40 days and later the Father revealed His time has come to proclaim who He was and directly He read it before the congregation.

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

**"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE
GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO
PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND
RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET
FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE
LORD."**

And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant

and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luk 4:16-21)

He was called to preach deliverance to the captives, recover sight to the blind and set free the oppressed. His powerful ministry brought hope and life to the hopeless, the poor and the disillusioned. He commanded not just hundreds but thousands of followers so that he earned the ire of the most religious and learned men of His nation. He moved in spiritual insight that few could deny its power and brilliance of reasoning. In fact, when He was telling, "ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," His people were all looking for the Messiah who was to come and set them free. He was giving hint and He hinted them many times of who He was but few were spiritually responsive among the elite of the day; they were offended the way He came...as a peasant rather than a conquering Messiah who would rescue the Jews from the grip of the Romans. Even so, he took a few bands of men whom He transformed into formidable leaders that rocked the world even bringing the Roman Empire to its knees so that during the time of Constantine, he decided not to fight against it but rather as official religion of the empire.

Jesus was a non-conformist. Diplomatic at times but never compromising; He knew where to cut the synagogue leaders...and that was to reveal their hypocrisy and show the truth to the people. When He proclaimed that He was the

One whom they have been waiting, His very own congregation disowned and wanted to throw Him down the cliff. He proclaimed His message that He was the Messiah but did it by proclaiming His Kingdom, campaigning from house to house and from village to village. He did mighty works and healed as many as the Father wanted which John wrote that if they be ever catalogued, the world would not be enough to contain them. Though often beset by spies from the priests and seen as a mere carpenter with gifts of healing, Jesus was never offended at this and set-off and preached more the message He was given from the Father. This was the point where many of the leading Jews were offended. The Jewish leaders were trained in the best theological and debating schools of their day, and to note that someone without training and scholarship would be found preaching, giving seminars in mountain and lake view resorts, in boat cruise and still gaining a large following, it offended them. It aroused their envy.

And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the

days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way. And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority. (Luk 4:2-32).

In most instances, it was the people from the lowest class of the society who would always readily accept Him as the Messiah. The theologians, doctors, lawyers and the priests of the day were always wary and doubtful of Him. They in fact persecuted Him being envious of the large following He commands among the people of the lowest classes of the Jewish society (see Matt 4.24-25). The first instance of a recorded persecution in which He narrowly escaped death was when He was about to be thrown down a cliff by His own people because they thought of Him as a mere carpenter just as was his father Joseph who was a carpenter. So when Jesus introduced Himself in a new way, the familiarity of the people

to His face and occupation became a hindrance for them to recognize Him in a new way and be blessed by God. They thought...is this not Joseph's son? Is this not the carpenter in one of the shops from our main street? Their familiarity became an obstacle for the blessing they could have received. Thus, Nazareth missed the blessing and Jesus moved to Capernaum a city nearby that readily accepted who He was thereby fulfilling what He has said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown (Luk 4:24).

Jesus welcomed in Capernaum

The Lord never intended to outrage the people of Nazareth, yet their bondage to the old Jesus whom they knew as a little boy playing in the outskirts of the city or helping his father Joseph became a stumbling block for them to believe in Him. They thought they knew all about Jesus... that He was just that...a common carpenter, an old familiar member of the Synagogue. This is the bondage of the familiar. We often think we know everything about someone because he had been our friend and playmate. But when we suddenly saw him one day in the television as an evangelist and pastor, we are surprised to know the old kid from the block was now a servant of God.

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read (Luk 4:16).

There are several points I want us to note in here: First,

although Jesus was persecuted in his hometown, he did not revile or cursed them. Second, when we think we know everything about someone else, take heed for this bondage to the familiar can lead us all to miscalculate about everyone. We are not all knowing, God is. This is why we need to stay dependent on the Holy Spirit for every counsel we need. Joshua made a mistake of assuming that all rugged and old clothed people are from afar costing him to spare the Gibeonites. Apart from this, familiarity can lead to a narrow view of people. As a young child I made a mistake of assuming that all white people are Americans so that every time I saw one, I thought he was American but when I flew out of the country for the first time when I was to do my graduate studies, I was surprised to find out that there are many variations of a white skin just as there are for black and brown colors too. Third, taking offense at God brings us to nothing. Nazareth which missed its visitation was offended because God came in a human skin rather than in a shining armor or covered with guns and swords. When we are offended the way God visited us, we might as well miss His message to us. Let us remain vigilant of the way the Lord comes to us.

Many among us who gets born again after leaving our first congregation come back with a burning desire to share the gospel to our old folks but get offended that many of them are lukewarm. Like many newcomers and babes in Christ, I have almost burned my bridge and frowned at my first congregation where I grew up attending because I felt like

there were no strong efforts to preach the new birth or redemption even just at especial services for the youth. There was no strong conviction of the Holy Spirit because He is not preached. Yet because our home was situated nearby we attend to it continually whenever we have our vacation in our province. In the case of Jesus, He did not denounce His synagogue at Nazareth nor spread false rumor and accusations against it. Like Him, we must learn to keep our mouth shut and keep praying for what we want to be changed in a place or in a worship group we are in. By doing this we keep ourselves from partaking in the ministry of the devil which was to accuse the Brethren.

Though Jesus was rejected by Nazareth, He was firm to never give up on Nazareth. When He gave His comments, it was always directed towards the leaders. Jesus never burned His bridges including his line of ministry; He never criticized a fellow prophet or denounced John the Baptist as an old incompetent prophet. He always honored them whenever He can. Burning our bridges can be detrimental where our cause is to set people free from their bondages and bring the truth to sink deep in their hearts. If we are sent to our own people who does not like us, the least we can do is to pray for them and heal them. Jesus rebuked James and John for thinking according to this line when their message was rejected. The Lord was an itinerant preacher, moving from place to place and staying where the night has set in so that one time they need to stay at a Samaritan village. As they inquired though, they were outrightly rejected because the villagers thought he

was going to Jerusalem. Upon hearing this, James and John said, "**Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?**" **But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."** **And they went on to another village. (Luk 9:54-56).** We are here to save men's lives, to bring healing and freedom and not to destroy them. When we are rejected let us remember that the Lord was and so did the early disciples.

In addition, true freedom comes from the presence of the Lord, that is, "**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty**" (2 Co 3:17 KJV). Nazareth was the very place where Jesus grew up and met people in the market place. It was also the place where He first preached and was first rejected. It was mentioned in the Bible that He was not able to do mighty miracles and wonders in the very place where he was brought up because He was limited by the people (Mk 6:5). Consider this, countless miracles and healings occur by the myriads of people joining a conference and crusade in Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines and in many parts of Asia and Russia but not much in Europe or in North America. We might ask why, but the main reason is because we lack the faith of the Gentile centurion (Luk 7:9)

When faith is substituted by daily programs and man's wealth we are in danger of falling to the worse condition that a believer can fall to. Without change of heart, Europe will

continue to fall into darkness and endanger itself of falling into a total secular state where the few with faith will be subject to increasing persecution. The Lord works in mighty ways but if there is one essential ingredient He would be looking for, it would be faith or the expectant hope of the people. Without this expectant hope or faith, we can't expect any miracles to take place. Jesus could have established His headquarters in Nazareth and this City could have been greatly blessed but because it has seen a great light and rejected it, even its very significance declined and waned. In Capernaum, Jesus was accepted and welcomed by the people, thus He established His headquarters in this area and the people were blessed with countless miracles and stirring teachings (see Matt 11:23).

“But passing through their midst, He went His way. And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority.”

(Luk 4:30-32)

“And leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: **"THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES-- "THE PEOPLE**

WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mat 4:13-17)

Another effect of offense would be bitterness. Many new Christians become easy target of bitterness and spew this out to others when left unchecked. They get offended when the preacher talk about money, talk about idolatry but do not get offended when charged by Jollibee or McDonald's for what they have eaten. Offense can do much to destroy our souls. The very thing that an offended person does first is to frown, get depressed and turn a cold heart on others. The Lord warned us that in the last days hatred and betrayal will increase even among the Brethren. One thing we can do is to choose where we would be, to camp in the Lord's army or be a casualty in the enemy's camp. Offenses must be forgiven or they become open doors by which bitterness will incubate and destroy the person and many unsuspecting others. You may not agree but it is also a betrayal to the cause of Heaven when God's children try to evade or accuse an elder or pastor who spoke about tithes and offerings. We must not stumble on these issues but agree to it that whatever we sow, we have sown it for heaven's cause and not to think that we are just enriching the coffer's of the church or the pastor. Indeed there will be pastors and leaders overcome with filthy luces but to discipline them or to change them will not be our job.

We must learn to focus that the very things we do, we do it for the Lord. Or we will always stumble at things we should not. Though the great fall will come, we will stand by the grace of God if only we learn to give grace to others daily as well as ask Him to protect and keep us from stumbling. It will not be by our power that we will be standing; it will be by His!

**"Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold."
(Matt 24:9-12 NLT)**

When we forget that we are offended and later on spew out bitterness, our quest for freedom has turned into a bondage we have never imagined. But if we welcome Him in our lives, if we learn to recognize Him in any form He comes in, and if we don't get offended at Him, we are not far from the Kingdom of God.

"Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and *the* Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan.” (Mat 4:23-25)

Chapter 3

The path to freedom

"You shall have no other gods before Me." "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (Exo 20:3-5)

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Joh 8:32)

The path to freedom as the Lord Jesus teaches is knowing the Truth. Truth is not merely the inscriptions we know and read in the Bible. It is above all a Person and rightly so, we need to get connected to Him to be set free. The main reason we find many bound and deceived is not because they do not know the truth but rather because they do not have love for the Truth (2 Thess 2:10). Truth can kill when we do not know how to use it well and when we are not truly connected to the person of Truth (Joh 14:6). This was the main reason why the very ones who proclaimed the truth did not find it and even persecuted the very One whom they were seeking. They could look at Him squarely with their two eyes and still ask what is

truth?

Let us take a look once more about offenses. Offense was the single biggest reason why the Jews rejected Jesus Christ because He came like a pauper, a suffering Messiah which offended many of them. They were offended in the package the Father sent His gift to them and to this world. To them they would like to imagine the Messiah to be the conquering hero who would rescue them not just from sin or corruption but also from the clutches of the Roman Empire. To see Jesus proclaiming Himself the King of the Jews who was born a peasant and who later became a carpenter in one of the most backward places of Israel was really an offense to most of them. He was the very opposite of their imagined Savior, a case they could not reconcile with their theology so that frustration and confusion run high among them. For a people whose society, culture and practice has been one of the most distinct and oppressed, the only image that matters to them is the image painted by former leaders that promised them a King, a conquering Messiah who would free them from the very oppression that the Roman emperors has yoked them. They however stumbled over the prophecies and passages that refer to Jesus Christ as their true Messiah who would set them free. They have forgotten that the very first issue between them and God was never political freedom but idolatry. They were exiled from the Promised Land not because they lost their freedom but because of their idolatry. When we forget the real issues, we are almost always certainly to end up expecting the wrong answers.

“Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see. Where have you not been adulterously lain with? By the wayside you have sat waiting for lovers [eager for idolatry], like an Arabian [desert tribesman who waits to plunder] in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your vile harlotry and your wickedness (unfaithfulness and disobedience to God). Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no spring rain. Yet you have the brow of a prostitute; you refuse to be ashamed.”
(Jer 3:2-3 AMP)

“And I saw, even though [Judah knew] that for this very cause of committing adultery (idolatry) I [the Lord] had put faithless Israel away and given her a bill of divorce; yet her faithless and treacherous sister Judah was not afraid, but she also went and played the harlot [following after idols].” (Jer 3:8 AMP)

“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray [to favorite places of idolatry] on mountains [that seduce]. They have gone from [one sin to another] mountain to hill; they have forgotten their [own] resting-place.” (Jer 50:6 AMP)

“And I will set My face against them; they shall go out from one fire and another fire shall devour them, and you shall know (understand and realize) that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them.

And I will make the land desolate (laid waste and deserted) because they have acted faithlessly [through their idolatry], says the Lord.” (Ezek 15:7-8 AMP)

The spiritual leaders of Israel became blind to the other passages that refer to the Messiah who would be bearing the sin of the world, crushed, marred, despised and downtrodden, **“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3 KJV)**. They have been blinded by their personal agenda of political freedom which promises the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel and their desire to see a conquering King who would save them. It was much like the times of the prophet Samuel when the people cried out for a king to rule them and God gave them Saul (I Sam 8:5). They wanted a king and they wanted it badly so that Saul became their king; a king who was ruled by his insecurities and false sense of humility. They have forgotten the real issues between them and God so that sin easily clouded their views, **“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2 KJV)**.

When Jesus proclaimed who He was by reading the passage written by prophet Isaiah, the people of His congregation almost threw Him down the cliff! In this passage, **“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has**

sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn” (Isa 61:1-2), was the cornerstone of His ministry and life; He came to set the captives free. But even His very hometown rejected His message and refused to believe Him, that, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luk 4:21).** It is amazing to find that even when God preaches Himself to people, we are very stubborn to not believe in Him. They could have other reasons to not believe in Him but even Moses prophesied of His coming, **“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. (Deu 18:15).** Sin can blind us, and so are traditions which are not based on truth (Matt 15:3). The more we do them, the more we think they are right although in the end we are simply wrong. When we do not take risk to explore the new things that God are doing we will certainly end up empty and without hope (Isa 43:19).

What happened?

One thing is clear during the time of the Lord’s first appearance to Israel, apostasy has taken its toll among the people and the clergy. Tradition has supplanted the love for truth (Matt 15:3) and religion has become a commodity among the cleric (Matt 23:13). In fact, the Lord has to send His harbinger and the most anointed servant heaven can produce to shake up the fallow ground and prepare the people

for Him. John's work was to prepare the way of the Lord and to point at Him that He was indeed...the Lamb of God.

“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'” John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” (Mar 1:2-5)

John was there as a representative of all the Old covenant prophets to point to Jesus that indeed He was the Messiah they have been waiting for. Under the Law of Moses no one will be accepted according to his own account, **“In the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed”** (Deu 19:15). And Jesus Himself said, **"If I *alone* bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true. "There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the testimony which He bears of Me is true. "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. "But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. "But the witness which I**

have is greater than *that of* John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. "And the Father who sent Me, He has one witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. (Joh 5:31-37). Thus, John the Baptist, the works that He did and the voice of the Father testified that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah that Israel failed to see. In spite of passing all close scrutiny according to the Scriptures, Jesus was still rejected because His message did not ring with the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees. Only the humble, the contrite and the repentant came to Him. His message left a trail of hope, forgiveness, healing and life among the peasants, laborers, and commoners such as the fishermen of Galilee, the Samaritan woman who was living in immorality, the Prostitute, the Lepers and a Pharisee and rich man who sought the Truth. They found that Jesus Christ was indeed the true Messiah and welcomed Him as thus without much ado. With the simple, Jesus showed Himself openly including to the Samaritan woman,

"The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?"

The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him. (John 4:25-30 NLT)

“And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have* done." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world." (Joh 4:39-42)

They also believe without much questioning having found Him to be the Savior they were looking for. Those who have much faith are not always rich but God has become their greatest treasure. The rich are often almost always poor of faith and their treasures do not last to eternity.

Pride blinds, humility opens heaven's blessings

Thinking back of the Samaritan woman, the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ and the commoners who were always there to listen to His teachings and contrasting them with the Pharisees and Sadducees, I find that people with less in life materially are often gifted with a spiritual discernment that not even the

learned can fathom. The Lord said, **"I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from *the* wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight (Luk 10:21).** Even the apostle Paul wisely considered this and wrote, **"For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent...But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence"** (1Co 1:19, 27-29). The very wisdom and learning of the Pharisees became a stumbling block to their understanding of God. They thought they knew everything there is in the Law of Moses to understand how God operates. Pride blinds. The spiritual leaders of the Israel failed miserably and missed everything concerning the prophecies about the coming Messiah. They misled their people and until now they are waiting for the first coming of their Messiah. On the other hand, the Samaritans, commoners and other malcontents were quick to believe in the Lord, including those who have needs for food, healing and salvation. This observation has not changed today. The more affluent societies today have buried their Bibles long time ago while the poor and needy are more open to talking about the gospel as well as their needs. The humble who confesses his need of Him comes to dwell with

Him regardless of status in this life and He teaches His ways. To the proud He remains to be the Rock of offense and resists all attempts to seek the truth.

“For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.” (1Pe 2:6-8)

“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”(Jas 4:6-8)

“He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way.” (Psa 25:9)

Paul’s life is a good illustration of how God can transform one of the most vicious persecutors in history to one of the greatest defenders of faith. He was according to his confession, a Pharisee of Pharisees from the tribe of

Benjamin; he was a persecutor of the Church, a murderer. But with one blinding light from the Lord, this prince of Pharisees heard the Lord and saw a vision of Him which totally transformed his life right side up. He claimed to know the truth but when he met the Truth Himself, he was blinded and could not see for days until another disciple healed him. When we claim to know something when we don't fully understand it, we block the light of understanding. It is always better to say, "Yes, I know it" or "No I don't". Paul persecuted Christians because he claims to know them that they were false. Many people who have near death experiences or those afflicted with terminal diseases almost always know where to focus their strengths and energies; their afflictions guide them to do a no nonsense thing. When John Milton became totally blind, his poetry became more intense, more graceful and found his solitude in Christ alone. He wrote, "Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained" when he was already blind. To find true freedom, one has to be humble, able to receive from others regardless of the messenger. The lover of Truth will always find a way though the path maybe strewn with thorns and briars.

Chapter 4

Casting out your idols

Joshua, the commander of the Israelite Army had grown too old already for war but there are still plenty of lands to conquer and distribute. Thus, he finally made a briefing to his comrades and fellow soldiers so that they will continue what they have begun. He exhorted the people and said,

"Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. (Jos 24:23-26)

“Strange gods” are idols we look to for protection, prosperity and decorations etc. In many places around the world, people have been gifted with imagination and carving skills so that they can reproduce these into various media. They use canvas, walls, ceilings, stones and wood paving the way for the modern art and billboards we now see around us. In the province of Batangas for example in the Philippines, wood

carvers create astonishing glossy wood carvings of the Santo Nino and use them as amulets and decorations. Many think that these are harmless objects and that these are simply used for church purposes such as during masses in the Roman Catholic churches to encourage people to see the face of God. Although these are great artistic renditions, they fail to capture the divine substance and can become a stumbling block where God is relegated to a wooden image much like the idols that Israel invented during its time. What does the Bible say about such things?

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exo 20:4-6)

Images and paintings that capture stages in Christ's life as well as portray biblical stories in stained windows or walls in Europe were said to be windows to heaven. But sometimes the demarcation between artistic awe to that of worshipping the stone or the wood becomes confusing so that many people think the wooden figure is God himself to be venerated for.

Throughout the period of Christian History there have been widespread disputes about the use of images, paintings and

sculpture. It can be argued that modern painting itself derived from the flourishing art that was primarily incubated by the Christian monks in various monasteries during the Dark Ages. They used art to illustrate the various passages and parables in the Bible which many illiterates may not be able to understand by directly reading them in Latin Bibles. These forms of art survived well into the Middle Ages and found its greatest expression during the Renaissance period. Clearly, the proponents of Christian art such as the venerable theologian Thomas Aquinas, wrote that images in the church serve a threefold purpose: (1) for the instruction of the uneducated in place of books; (2) for illustrating and remembering the mystery of the incarnation; and (3) for awakening the passion of devotion, which is kindled more effectively on the basis of viewing than through hearing. I have no problem with these justifications and threefold purpose but people need to be taught that indeed these were the main reasons. But when people kneel down and bow before an image or painting we see that this purpose to educate them about the Christ revealed in the art has been defeated by idolatry.

“And I saw, even though [Judah knew] that for this very cause of committing adultery (idolatry) I [the Lord] had put faithless Israel away and given her a bill of divorce; yet her faithless and treacherous sister Judah was not afraid, but she also went and played the harlot [following after idols].” (Jer 3:8 AMP)

“But as for those whose heart yearns for and goes after

their detestable things and their loathsome abominations [associated with idolatry], I will repay their deeds upon their own heads, says the Lord God.”
(Ezek 11:21 AMP)

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” (1 Cor 10:14 NASB)

Distinguishing between art and idolatry

Today’s multifaceted art has come a long way from what it has been originally. From the simple sketches and paintings of early man found in caves to complex animations and movies. Art has indeed come a long way and it is an expression of God’s creativity within man. Idolatry has not vanished however and it has taken a more subtle form that many of us need to discern well. Although images and paintings are not anymore venerated as sacred objects of worship except Buddhists and Hindu temples, idolatry has nevertheless stayed. Most Protestant and Catholic nations in Europe may not be worshipping Mary and the saints anymore than paying respect to an awe inspiring creative work of art such as the Sistine Chapel, the Last Supper and the portraits of Maddona and Child. How did this come about can be trace back to the Reformation and to St. Thomas Aquinas whose defense of the use of images is not at all foolish or idolatrous. During the Reformation, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli fought the Pope vehemently on the grounds of authority using the Bible to promulgate doctrines and to filter out anything which has no biblical basis. Many of these

myths which have been demolished by the Reformation include the doctrine of the Catholic Church that the Pope is infallible like Jesus Christ and the doctrine of Transubstantiation and Mediation by the saints and Mary. Luther, Zwingli and many other leaders fought these with the motto, *Sola Scriptura*, or the Scriptures alone. All doctrines must be tested based on its validity in the Bible and no doctrine will be accepted that has no relations with the Bible. This facilitated the translation of the Bible in the native tongues of the leaders and allowed many of the people to read for themselves the Word of God for the first time. With the Word of God spreading like a wildfire and the books and pamphlets of the Reformers impacting many of their people, the oppressive role of the Pope gradually diminished freeing many nations to grow independently and nurture their own paths to freedom.

One of the best theses of Protestant declaration that has a broad impact was that of Zwingli who formally introduced the principles of the Reformation to Zurich. The main theses he put forth were (1) that the church is born of the Word of God and has Christ alone as its head; (2) that its laws are binding only insofar as they agree with the Scripture; (3) that Christ alone is man's righteousness; (4) that the Holy Scripture does not teach Christ's corporeal presence in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper; (5) that the mass is a gross affront to the sacrifice and death of Christ; (6) that there is no biblical foundation for the mediation or intercession of the dead, for purgatory, or for images and pictures; and (7) that marriage is

lawful to all.

These changes ultimately released the people to be able to read the Bible in their own native tongues for the first time. This enabled them to understand what is being preached and removed deception in their midst. With the growth and the emphasis of personal faith and judgment among the people so was the progress towards a democratic form of governance and complete separation between the Church and the State. An example of this was John Calvin who influenced the existence of most of these Western nations by his teachings in Geneva. He made Geneva an example of a Christian state which in turn influenced many other cantons and nations.

Thus, the indulgences, infallibility of the Pope, the veneration of images and purgatory became a laughingstock because of the Protestants. Darkness and idolatry which hovered over many nations rolled back like a towel as the Reformation spilled all over Germany, Scandinavia, Netherlands, Bohemia and other surrounding countries such as France and Switzerland. Martin Luther's conviction of justification by faith alone and the sole authority of the Bible became a rallying cry that dethroned Catholicism from its grip across lands in Europe. He stood like a shining lighthouse amidst the darkness of his times and without him, it would be impossible to imagine democracy, nationalist sentiments, Cultural Revolution and Reformation. Matter of factly, our nation owes a lot from this German theologian and reformer. It was because of his boldness to stand against the Pope and the

Catholic Church that the English ruler and reformer Henry the VIII of England change his stance of Catholicism. Out of England, the Puritans came to North America and subsequently established the United States of America which also sent its first missionaries through the USS Thomas to the Philippines in the 1900s. Without the Thomasites, the Philippines would be 90% Catholics without having understood the meaning of Reformation and Protestantism. Thus, in the Protestant movement art was only censured when it has become an idolatrous object of worship. It must be noted that during the Renaissance period, many of the painters who were commissioned to do Biblical paintings, murals and arts were in fact Christians, monks and professional artists. It was a period when Heaven has opened its windows and poured out creativity in men unsurpassed in any other period of time. The period between 1400s and 1600s can be described as “God kept up with man” by systematically pouring out great light and revelation within two centuries which resulted to what we call as Renaissance.

Spain and the Philippines

Although Spain ruled the Philippines for 333 years the bulk of those three centuries were spent making Catholics out of the Filipinos and trades that only prospered the elite classes and fostered a regional division among the Filipinos. The Philippines had scarcely known the Reformation or the Enlightenment which occurred in Europe because information was mainly controlled by the friars. But when the opportunity to travel abroad open up to many Filipinos, they

went to study in Europe particularly in Spain. Most of them have a threefold purpose, to enjoy their studies and to bring grievances about the abuses of the Spanish friars in the Islands and to bring the needed correction or representation of the Philippines as a colony of the Spanish Empire. When this plan was not achieved, the Filipino leaders resorted to no other than force to bring Freedom from oppression of the people. This band of Filipino leaders in Europe has been called the Propagandist movement because of their method to achieve their goals of representation. These were not religious men but everyone of them put their personal agenda behind the main goal of achieving either representation or Independence. One of them, Rizal, wrote his two novels, *El Filibusterismo* and *Noli Me Tangere* to expose the abuses of Spanish friars as well as to inspire the people of collectivism and cooperation to work towards their nationhood. In Rizal's novel, he did not only espouse the idea of birth of a nation but proclaimed the evils of being in bondage to religiosity. Religion was used as a cloak by Spain not only to influence the people but to damage their individual judgments and control their decision making, thus we find a religious and naïve Capitan "Tiago in the novel and a boisterous and beastly priest called Fray Damaso who controls the family matters of Capitan "Tiago. On the other hand, Crisostomo Ibarra embodies the savior in the novel looking forward to redeeming the motherland. Rizal faced martyrdom in Bagumbayan fearlessly because he has understood what it means to pay the price for his writings as well as he understood the meaning of redemption and the works of Jesus Christ. He was not afraid to say no to the Roman Church to

do the last sacrament rite to him because deep in his heart he found solace in his Savior whom he tried to emulate. Today his greatness remains firm in the heartland of the Philippines for whom he died. You might wonder what these things have to say about idolatry....

Well, although it has been more than 100 years since the foundation of the Philippines as an independent country, we are still enslaved by our false sense of religion. To say the least, the Roman Catholic Church still controls and sways the mind of most Filipinos so that even in governance and public policies, we are influenced by no less than the Archbishop of Manila. They still continue to shape and intimidate the decision making of many poor Filipinos who remain as religious as Capitan “Tiago. After 100 years, Protestants and Evangelicals have not surpassed the number of the Catholics in this country. Population control by artificial methods is still opposed by the Council of Catholic Bishops of the Philippines. It is hard to make progress when the population of the country remains to be large and uncontrolled while its productivity does not keep pace with the increase of the number of households to feed. Many Filipinos remain poor because their minds refuse to be renewed, refuse to change and refuse to accept that economics is a precise math and not hope. We hope in a prayer, that is true, but we work also as much as we can without thinking about hope. Both spheres are one in the big picture but in actual practice are separate. That is why David can go and worship the next day after he killed a Philistine because he understood that he functions in

both realms. He is both King of Israel and a worshipper of God. He has to defend Israel as well as to serve God because God wants him to. In practice, this is where most religious Filipinos stumble, they want to serve God as leaders but remain ambivalent whether its biblical to control reproduction. This is rooted in the faulty interpretation of biblical passages that says, “go forth and multiply”. When artificial control is suggested as a choice, this is not sin because we still multiply, we still bear children but we do not want to bear children to this world which we cannot cloth, feed and bring to school! Multiplication is a multifaceted word...it applies spiritually and physically. We reproduce disciples and thereby multiply churches; we reproduce ourselves and thereby have babies; we multiply our assets and talents and thereby have diverse businesses and creative outlets. Just on this one issue, Filipinos stumble to agree which one is saying the right thing. Until now, the priest’s mouth holds more power than the Word of God rightly divided and interpreted among the people. This is still idolatry, a priest or tradition supplanting the Word of God in the lives of the people.

Idolatry has been mainly associated in the Scriptures as images (Ex 20:5) but what God sees most is the heart (1 Sam 16:7). King Solomon gave an advice that we better take heed to wherever we are.

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.” (Prov 4:23)

**“Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.”
(Prov 4:23 AMP)**

“keep yourselves free from idols” (John 5:21).

And as we do so, we must also remember that to God, veneration of Mary and the saints, veneration trees, caves or relics are still unacceptable as they were thousands of years ago.

“You shall not make yourself any graven image [to worship it] or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; You shall not bow down yourself to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.” (Ex 20:4-5 AMP)

Mediocrity of advocacy other than Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul wrote it succinctly: **For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus (1Ti 2:5).** The Lord Jesus Christ became a man not just to make the Jews stumble or baffle the Iglesia ni Kristo about His humanity but for us to understand that He who was God in Heaven vacated His seat to feel and share the burdens of becoming a human being. Although He was God, He humbled Himself so that He became man to identify with us

in all our struggles aside from enabling Him to be crucified.

“who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phi 2:6-8).

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Heb 8:6).

Contrary to many priestly teachings of the Roman Catholic church, our advocate is not Mary, neither the saints. The Scriptures below contradict this assumption and expressly tell that our only Advocate and our only Mediator is Jesus Christ. It's not like, there is an advocate general and another advocate ultimate...there can only be one as the Scriptures are clear on that. Anything more or less than this is bordering on deception and hallucination.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world” (1Jn 2:1-2).

What does the word advocate means? It means someone pleads for your cause. In the court of law, we have attorneys and lawyers. In England, professional advocates are called barristers who plead for the cause of someone in the court of law with audience. Do you think the saints who died can do that in heaven? Can Mary who mothered and nursed Jesus when He was a baby do that? Who can be a more powerful advocate? Mary or Jesus? It is a false logic that just because Mary nursed Jesus she has also to nurse us in prayers. She died and she is in heaven right now but she is not God and she is not even in a very high position of Advocate.

The only One who can advocate for someone in the court of Heaven is the One who has experienced Heavenly judgment Himself. This is the very reason why the apostle John wrote...he was made propitiation or a sacrifice for our sins just after telling us “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. Moreover, Mary cannot become that righteous person whom the apostle John wrote. The Greek word for righteous in verse 1 is *dikaio* which simply means holy, equitable, just, meet, right and who is good? Who is more than meet and more than right that this refers to? Who is the only sinless man? None but Jesus Christ!

Therefore you do not need other advocates to make your prayers heard because the One who made ears can't He hear your causes and leadings when you come and knock at His door daily? This mediocrity has been ingrained in our society coming from the practice of useless prayers being sponsored

by saints and Mary so that we always need a ninong and a ninang in order to get to a higher position or job. It is time to change this mentality.

Idolatry punished in Israel

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah proclaimed:

“How foolish are those who manufacture idols to be their god. These highly valued objects are really worthless. They themselves are witnesses that this is so, for their idols neither see nor know. No wonder those who worship them are put to shame”(Isaiah 44:9 NLT)

“Every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge; Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols; For his molten images are deceitful, And there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of mockery; In the time of their punishment they will perish.” (Jer 10:14-15)

The maker of idols makes money but at the same time deceives people; propagate nothing but idolatrous worship that brings the wrath of God (Exo. 20:5). This idolatrous worship which many could camouflage as – “we just need to see a picture in order to focus on Jesus”, is nothing but a cup out! God’s burning rage against the people who do this is seen at how He punished Israel so that they were dispersed to the nations. The prophet Daniel prayed **“O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from this city Jerusalem, thy holy**

mountain, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us” (Daniel 9:16 KJV). Did the Lord hear Daniel’s prayer? Absolutely but then He has to be faithful according to His word in which He punishes the sins of the fathers and including the children. The Lord has already sent many warnings and prophets to keep them from idolatry but they pressed on to worship Baal, stones, trees and many more. The prophet Daniel and his generation were the first to be exiled out of Israel due to their father’s sins. Another prophet, Jeremiah, foretold of these events when Israel will become captive in Babylon because of their wicked ways. The prophet wrote,

“Again the Lord spoke to me and said, "I have discovered a conspiracy against me among the people of Judah and Jerusalem. They have returned to the sins of their forefathers. They have refused to listen to me and are worshipping other gods. Israel and Judah have both broken the covenant I made with their ancestors. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am going to bring calamity upon them, and they will not escape. Though they beg for mercy, I will not listen to their cries. Then the people of Judah and Jerusalem will pray to their idols and burn incense before them. But the idols will not save them when disaster strikes! Look now, people of Judah; you have as many gods as you have towns. You have as many altars of shame—altars for burning incense to your god Baal—as there are streets in Jerusalem. (Jer 11:9-13

NLT)

“And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” (Jer 29:7 NLT)

Israel was freed from Egypt so that God can make His habitation among them. He wanted to use them as a testimony of His power to transform men in spite of how evil the surroundings can be. Since the fall of man, satan boasts that God can save men but He cannot change them. To accomplish this, the Lord has to drive away the people currently living in Canaan through the Israelites. He wants to do this because of the corruption and idolatry that has pervaded in their culture and society (Num 25:1; Deut 12:1). The Lord will use Israel like a sword to cut off the idolatrous nations before them and prepare the house of Israel to be His dwelling place.

“But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full.” (Gen 15:16)

"For My angel will go before you and bring you in to *the land of* the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them. "You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them, and break their

sacred pillars in pieces. **"But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. "There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. "I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you."** (Exo 23:23-27).

God hates idolatry not because He is selfish or self serving. He hates idolatry because it leads to our self destruction and to worshipping the creation rather than the Creator Who made all things beautiful. It is not a question that God should be worshipped through and through, rather, the question is do we really know how to worship God? We can only worship what we know. The Lord said, **"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."** (Joh 4:23-24)

Worship if it is true must be based on Truth and not on artistic brilliance. By this I do not despise landscapes, paintings, portraits, sculptures and carvings. What I despise is when we worship and put our faith on the canvas, wood, stones or relics which cannot speak or add a cubit to our spiritual benefits. Idolatry can also lead to exaltation of personalities from Mary to the thousands of known and

unknown saints. True worship must be Christ centric. Exalting Jesus must be the work and preoccupation of the Christian in any capacities he can. Jesus rose up from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father having triumphed on the Cross so that He deserves our worship. We don't need to go to Jerusalem, to Rome or to the Pope or to a Pastor to pray to God and hear Him. We can abide in Him by bringing our worship day by day to His throne of grace. This is the true worship the Father seeks.

The case of the Philippines

Poverty in the Philippines has two main causes, first is a poverty mentality and the other is economics. The poverty mentality encompasses the veneration of idols as propagated in many Catholic churches. Although unseen and seemingly harmless, idol worship encompasses the system of patronage where people are easily controlled of their choices. In this system, what the patron chooses will become the officially adopted system of the receiver regardless of how foolish the choices of the patron can be. The danger in this system is when the wrong beliefs are in place and propagated as truth. For example in the Spanish Philippines, the church is used to lul people to obey whatever the government or the priests have agreed to as good. Because the people were unsuspecting, naïve and do not have access to outside information, they are forced to obey what information they have been given to. When war broke out in one part of the Philippines such as in Zamboanga, conscripts from Pampanga or Manila will be delivered to Zamboanga to fight their fellow

Filipinos because they have been brainwashed that they were fighting against evil and cunning Muslims who killed Christians. So when the independence and revolutionary movements arose in different parts of the Philippines, many of the soldiers used by the Spanish to suppress these rebellions were also made of other Filipino conscripts from another region. This basically laid the foundation of a divided mentality among the Filipinos in the future and distrust between each other or between Muslims and Christians. Today this patron system still abounds in the government such as when the president does not have strong spiritual basis for himself or herself, he cannot make bold moves because of fear of repercussions from his patrons. Thus to be a president in the Philippines one has to seriously stand out against issues such as bribery, perks, gifts, abortion, and population control. When the head of the government is controlled by his various friends and associates, he cannot make any lasting impact. Progress cannot be attained by sole elimination of the patron system; there must be renewal within the government and system. Communism is a failed system which was formerly typified by Russia but is now a democratic and market based system including China and Vietnam. Revolution according to Mao Tse Tung is also a failed system because in a poor state which is largely religious, exposed to principles of liberty and sensitive to suppression of voices, this will not work. What works then? Federalism can achieve a good framework system to work with because of strong regional identification of most Filipinos. But at the same time, a national renewal and movement that espouses the love for honesty, integrity and

efficient service will be needed apart from a barrage of advertisements and values education in public schools. History subjects should be studied for the lessons they highlight and give rather than just the information they provide. A strong foundation to honor our fathers should not be forgotten because only in honoring them will we appreciate and find solace in their sacrifices for the country. They were young, brilliant, and indefatigable and used their talents to lay the groundwork of the foundation of our country. Without them, the future of this nation could have been jeopardized and bleaker.

Once again, the patron system is a general system that embodies the core of influence on the government. If there would be a more accurate description of its motto, it would be, “me first before others”. The Americans left the Philippines in 1946 and gave us a heritage of how to run an efficient government. That anointing has only been shelved but is available to any Christian leader who supposes that God may have called him to serve in such capacity. The “me first before others mentality” is a typical poverty mentality and one that shows a man overcome with his own lust for power. The Marcos government is a case in point. He was a man obsessed of ruling the country and when he promised to change the Philippines for the better, he indeed turned things around during his first term. An anointed speaker who can mesmerize his audience, Marcos was elected for a second term. It was in his second term that finally the devil showed his true color. Overcome with greed and power, Marcos plunged the

Philippines into binge borrowings from the IMF and World Bank and leaving a legacy of scandal, death, debts and corruption riddled government that until now has become a notorious model among many present day Marcosians. There is only one formula I found in any successful enterprise- a successful leadership in the office must have integrity as its core values. All unhappy endings fell because of compromising this single factor. Many African countries which could have been rich cannot attain to it because their leaders can be bought with money. They fell of money. Marcos and Hitler fell because of power. They love to control the government and when absolute power comes, so was the danger of falling to absolute corruption. If a leader in office compromises, he can fail in three things, money, woman or power. Abraham Lincoln correctly observed that, “if you want to test a man, give him power.”The Philippines continues to be a paradox in terms of development...a wide swath of fertile lands dot the archipelago where all kinds of trees and plants can survive for cultivation but until now the Republic has to still see a first world status which it aspires to be.

Our mediocrity in voting for corrupt leaders emanated from this...we justified that if the higher leaders has become corrupt, then we too can grab a hand on it even if it's just a few pesos off the record. This mentality has become entrenched since a corruption in the highest office in the land flows down to the smaller levels and offices. This is the domino effect and which until now the Philippines has to fight and overcome. Office leadership requires the highest

integrity in the leader who assumes that position. When the leader forgets who he is and what his position means, it will bring ruin to all. This is why righteousness exalts a nation while sin or corruption brings ruin to a nation.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people. The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely, But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully.” (Prov 14:34-35)

Sin as defined in Merriam-Webster's dictionary means debt, transgression, crime and this is what can be said of the rule of Marcos. He will forever be remembered for his massive debts of blood and mammon among his people. When his motives to rule was right, the republic prospered, but when he forgot why the people voted for him in the first place, corruption has set in and brought repercussions that he also hadn't wished to come. In parallel, the NAZIs may have brought economic revival to Germany in many ways, but the price of which was blood and money of the Jews. This is a recurring theme of error among many leaders at the top, they fall because of avarice for money or adultery or power-grabbing. Integrity is the utmost measure of a true leader which is why though King Solomon may well be remembered for his wisdom, King David, his father is more held in honor because of his high integrity. Greed is a form of idolatry, it is the worship of mammon which many naïve leaders fail to see and take a precaution from. Paul wrote,

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” Eph 4:18-24 (KJV)

When someone at the top has “given over himself” to greediness be it in the form of power, money or other ill motives, this is an evidence that corruption has set in. And with absolute power comes absolute corruption which explains the obstinate resistance anyone can have on dealing with such people. This kind of corruption which has over run the Philippines must be dealt with head on with a national consciousness of renewal. Paul advocates that we put of the past or “former conversations” of the past; this simply means in this context that we put an end to this evil by overcoming it with good, with a true renewal of the heart among elected leaders. Again we cannot overemphasize the need to pray for righteous leaders in the country. So we do not lose hope on our country’s condition but we do have proactive measures which start by releasing them in the heavenlies...through

constant barrage of prayers. Apart from forgiveness, we must learn to move on, or renew our minds...the lingering wars between the government and the communist parties as well as the muslim insurrection in the South are consequences of these. Our people have to learn forgiveness and move on, otherwise we will keep on looking back and we won't be ready for the future. This is what it means to have a renewed mind, a renewed country! South Korea determined to move on and heal its divisiveness. Though our country is far richer than South Korea or Japan in natural resources from minerals to agricultural produce, economic progress can be hindered by socio-cultural factors which I have already pointed out. We have not left the Marcos era yet; we are still stuck in the mud of corruption in the highest office. The recent scandals that continue to rock the Arroyo administration from fertilizer scams to cheating during the election shows where we are and the influence of evil machinations in several hierarchies in the government. It is soothing however to find that now the people are more vigilant than ever and more sensitive of choosing their leaders so that they toot and hoot whenever they find ills in the society. Our government is much like similar to a flying airplane which has two wings, one with the opposition and the government. Both are needed to govern the country well.

It is not easy to be the leader of any organization, much less to lead a country so the need to always pray for our leaders the good and the corrupt ones should always be heard from our mouths not just on Sundays but even daily. This is far better

than merely showing where he or she went wrong because we all need the grace of God so we can travel smoothly if not unhindered by all the obstacles we need to surmount and overcome in this life. Economic progress is good and we can easily compare the conditions of those people living in the developed countries to those in the third world countries. The disparity between the rich and the poor and the accessibility of services to both is a measure we can behold physically in the everyday lives of the ordinary citizens. In addition it is written that we put on righteousness or that we do the right thing. Any leader who would just obey these principles will be sure to find that the fruits of righteousness will always be more than the value of any riches or money. This is the true treasure that few are willing to pay for in order to find.

Chapter 5

Spiritual significance of idols

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I have gone."(Gen 35:1-3)

Since leaving his family as a fugitive and exile in Laban's family, Jacob lived like a wild man. He established a family, but with two warring wives for his attention, it was less than an ideal patriarch's family. And yet in all of these problems and struggles, Jacob has not forgotten God. He kept God in his consciousness and while fleeing from Laban's deceptiveness and ill treatment, God finally broke His silence in his life. He said, "Arise go up to Bethel, and dwell there." And like Joshua, he commanded all of his family to remove all idols that they have. Just as God called Abraham to go out from his birth place and relatives, He again did the same with Jacob...Arise and go to Bethel. What does He want with Jacob?

When Jacob heard the Lord speak to him about Bethel,

immediately he commanded his family to remove their idols. Bethel evokes something deep in Jacob's heart which we can only learn why by examining its meaning. Bethel means the "house of God". It reminds him of the very protection he received when he was fleeing from his brother Esau after he had deceived him of his birthright. This was also the place where he dreamed of angels moving to and fro in a ladder. This was a place of protection, a mighty fortress that kept him from all distress and threats. He has to flee from Laban because of the latter's deceptive and unjust treatments. Also, his two sons had just given him a big blow when they ran amok and killed the men of Shechem for raping Dinah their sister. This was the time God appeared and comforted him to go to Bethel.

There are three things we must take note. First, he immediately obeyed the voice of God and instructed the move to Bethel. Second, Jacob was reminded of God's protection and presence. Third, he was conscious of the holiness of God.

When told to flee from Shechem because of the embroilment his sons did, God was not only protecting Jacob from certain death but preserving a nation. Any disobedience would result to certain death for he confessed that, **"my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household"** (Gen 34:30). The Lord provided a way out and brought him under the hood of his protection. Like David, Jacob made the Lord his refuge and cried out in his distress.

The Lord's reminder of His protection came at a moment when Jacob was weak and greatly disturbed. He was confused of what to do seeing that his sons killed all the men of the city and not being satisfied with that looted the whole city from donkeys, camels and oxens; fierce was their vengeance for the rape of their sister. Moreover Jacob's reaction was quite urgent and he quickly demanded his household to remove their strange gods from among them upon remembrance of Bethel. Just as Jacob treated the Lord holy and consider it a sacrilege to enter Bethel with all the household gods and goddesses of his family, we are to enter the House of God with the same holiness... we are to "put away the foreign gods" and "purify ourselves and change our garments" (verse 2). To put away means to remove, cast out and totally abandon them; purify on the other hand means we filter out everything that is ungodly and undesirable from among us.

In Jacob's time their idols were made of stone, clay or wood and they can be burned or buried easily (Gen 35:4). In our times, we can do the same for any articles, relics and idols we are convicted of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, things or priorities that steal our time and affection from God can become idols and we risk being cut off from the Tree of Life. A life of purity is a life of power. It is holiness. This is what freedom from idolatry affords us for. If we forget to walk in purity, we won't see the hand of God moving in our lives. The writer of Hebrews wrote that only the pure can see God. God can manifest Himself in so many ways. He can come to us in

dreams or visions, in a man dressed as sick or needy or an angel with a message. He can also come in the form of blessings and relief from torments just as Jacob experienced (see Gen 28:12-13; 32:28; 35:1, 9).

“We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone. So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem.” (Gen 35:3-4 NLT)

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21 KJV)

“Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb 12:14 KJV)

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psa 24:3-5)

Purification rites

One of the simplest and oldest methods to purify wine is by constantly tipping it to another basin so that the impurities or

dregs remain at the bottom of the barrel. The flavor changes as the wine ages and poured out from one basin to another (see Jer. 48:11). Trials in this life have the same effects. They shake us away from our comfort zones, purify our motives, and bring us nearer to the Lord. Removing idolatry in our midst can have the same cleansing effect in our lives, society and nation.

Jacob's stance on removing idols before going to Bethel should call forth in us the same conviction and resolution. In the New Covenant, the dwelling place of God is not made with the hands of man. It is a body created by God. When Jesus walked on earth, He was constantly looking for a place to lay His head (Luk 9:58). Paul the apostle declared that we are the house of God (1Cor. 6:19). And being the house of God, He will not tolerate any idols residing in His very House. There can only be one master or resident in our hearts, either Jesus or yourself or your idol. You have to choose.

“And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor 6:16-18 NLT)

Put on the new garment

When Jacob commanded his household, he not only told them to destroy their idols and purify themselves. He also commanded them to change their garments. What does changing our garments symbolize? In the Bible changing your garments has an expressed meaning of changing your lifestyle. If the experience and preparation of Jacob was mainly physical, today this is applicable to our spiritual and physical lives. To put on a new garment speaks of donning the new man. For Jacob's family, it means they have to leave their old lives behind and accept a new lifestyle. For us, it means we must be born again. So whether you are a member of Catholic or Protestant or Evangelical branches of Christianity, you must be born again. You have to live in a new manner by giving up your idols and putting up God's agenda as your priority in this life. Paul puts it this way:

“But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.” (Col 3:8-15 NLT)

The basis of all the observed changes in a man is when we see them putting on the new self. This new self or new man is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.” This is the reason why we have a new creation because it is entirely different from the old one. It runs counter in image and character. If we are therefore the temple of God, we do well to put on the new man so that we experience the newness of life that can only be felt in Christ Jesus. This is why in Heaven and in many Reformed and born again churches, we see former murderers, robbers, stealers, adulterers, sorcerers and fornicators and drunkards translated from the kingdom of darkness into light; from sinners to saints.

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

Joshua's defeat

Just after tumbling down the strong and fortified city of Jericho whose walls and towers are said to be the gates of the

Promise Land, Joshua lost no time to conquer the lesser cities around the area. He secured around 3000 soldiers to destroy Ai which according to his plan needs only a small regiment to completely level to the ground. When his army attacked the city, they were in for a big surprise and ran scampering for safety. What he thought that only 3000 soldiers would be needed to destroy the city turned out to be a bloody and humiliating defeat. What went wrong?

Every good general tries to assess the situation and his present resources before he attacks the target. Joshua was surprised to find out that they were defeated by a much smaller army and city.

When Joshua asked the Lord for a second opinion, God spoke, **“Get up! Why are you lying down on your face like this? Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen the things that I commanded to be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them; they have also lied about it and hidden the things among their belonging. That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat...I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things away that were set-apart for destruction.”**(Joshua 7:10-12 NLT). By breaking their covenant with God, they were accursed. This could be one reason why people who backslid from following the Lord always end up much worse than before they have known Jesus Christ. Every covenant we make is binding from our marriage vows to our Covenant with our Maker. He who signs a covenant must understand the costs and benefits of making

so. Before following Jesus Christ, you need to count the costs lest you will become a fool who would one day be recalled as a good starter but never a finisher. Any covenants civil or spiritual are agreed by both parties to perform or otherwise there will be consequences. For example, a marriage vow cannot be broken apart from unfaithfulness of one of the signatories. One of the curses of breaking a marriage vow is not only loneliness, humiliation or defeat of our purpose. It is also denigrating the sanctity of marriage in the society. It cheapens what is otherwise good and foundation of the family.

In Joshua's army, by breaking a vow of purity and full allegiance to God alone, they have brought curses in the camp. It becomes an open door for the devil to oppress Israel for her unfaithfulness to God. Thus, the swift judgment the Lord brings to the lawbreaker. Early morning the next day after inquiring from the Lord, Joshua brought all the tribes and asked from the Lord who among the tribes broke the covenant and hid the accursed things. Line by line, one by one as they pass over him and until the Lord pointed to him the family of Achan. It must have been spooky and unnerving experience for most of them.

“So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD. Then Joshua

and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones" (Jos 7:22-25).

When God bans something from us or tell us not to go, it is imperative that we obey Him. More often than not we follow ourselves and do otherwise. Our minds are limited and we cannot completely comprehend the mind of God of why at times He may not say yes to our prayer wish lists or why He banned many items in the Old Testament. We may not completely know all the reasons, but we can trust that God's wisdom and understanding is better than ours. My goal is to try to understand the mind of God, His ways, His Church and what role I need to play. This world is just a stage for us and not a permanent residence to abide in. But more than understanding, it is my prayer to love God as He would let me with His love and find it as an expression of my love, to obey Him. When we forget the goal of our instruction which is to actually love God, we run counter to His Kingdom and we may risk our own lives. Before Achan stole the accursed things in Jericho, he has already committed covetousness many times in his heart. It became a doorway for the devil not just to oppress him and his family but the whole nation of Israel. This is one of the cases in the Bible where the sin of one

person becomes the liability of all. It was only Achan who did it but the consequences of his disobedience cost the defeat of the whole nation. He was more than disobedient; he was also a murderer and one who blatantly disregarded the words of the Lord. His punishment was heavy and it included the stoning of the entire family and including the accursed things.

When we keep our idols and disregard the warnings of God, beware of the repercussions because it will find you, your family, your congregation and even the whole nation. Can this be one of the reasons why we are always struggling for economic prosperity in the Philippines? His ways are mighty and strong; the only thing that He requires from us is to walk in fellowship with Him.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8)

“and (if) My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, (and) will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”(2 Ch 7:14)

Chapter 6

Bringing a revival to a nation

There is something wonderful in every Revival that happens. My definition of revival is God's visitation in such a way that people or places are markedly impacted. When God's waves of Revival swept the island of Wales in 1906, it emptied prison halls and bars and brought back many backslidden Christians to the fold. In Finland, revival broke out of home meetings during the period of 1977 to 1981 where thousands of conversions and expressions of the Holy Spirit were heralded. There were outbreak of healings, speaking in tongues and water baptisms that brought a great harvest of souls to the Kingdom of God. At the center of this awakening were the Holy Spirit and His instrument, Niilo Yli-Vainio of whom He used to bring countless healings and miracles not just during services but even handkerchiefs prayed over by him and the people of God. Every revival and awakening is alike in that they bring repentance, regeneration and fervor for the work of God. During each time, the devil also tries to bring his subtlety by bringing false accusations to mislead the people of God. During the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards who became the unofficial spokesman and theologian of the Great Awakening always tried to explain and keep the fires burning by encouraging the people of God. In contrast, Charles Chauncy, a liberal pastor kept on writing false accusations and speaking about excessive emotionalism of the people. Today

we can assess who is the fool between the two of them. Is God without emotions? And who declares and measures how far can our emotionalism be? The truth is, no one can measure the emotions of man for its simple complexity, not even psychology or science can create an instrument to measure its complexity or how many laugh or cry receptors can be triggered by an experience of God.

The truth is there are many revivals that we may not even have been able to document about. It happens all the time when God's people live in unity and seek the Lord together. David wrote, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, *and as the dew* that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore” (Psalms 133:1-3 KJV)**. When His people learns once more how to live together, to forgive and to love each other, revival will not be far from such community of believers. There is nothing that can break the heart of a father than to find his children always bickering together. How can the father command a blessing and the life flow of Heaven in such places? It would indeed be a waste of Heaven's resources to simply pour out His revival in such circumstances.

Great revivals are happening right now all over the world though in small pockets and untelevised, these will all join

together to form the big net used for the coming Great Harvest of unbelievers. When it will explode as one, globally, it will fill the earth and make it ready for the second coming before the anti-Christ will rule. As darkness tries to engulf the whole earth, His light will shine and arise in His people. In almost every Christian nation on earth, God's people are praying for a Revival. We must however be prepared for the Revival before it comes because there will be no time of preparation when it will finally break forth. We must learn to understand what factors contribute to bring a Revival and how to operate when it comes. More often, we will face the same struggles as the leaders have before us so understanding and reading histories of Revivals is a must for serious disciples to learn.

During the dedication of the temple of Solomon, it was said that His presence came down like a cloud that covered the place, **“so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” (2Ch 5:14)**. Such manifestations of the cloud of glory and even oil of anointing, gold dusts and even rain and rays of glory are all inevitable when we bring glory and joy to God. A part of heaven comes down to us every time we worship the Lord. Revivals are distinguished by the fervor and unity of the Brethren while manifestations of the Holy Spirit is much desired, it is the uniqueness of fervor among the believers that makes it uncommon. Revivals can truly transform myriads of people and affects the very place where it happens. It affects the way the people conduct their daily

activities from marketing and trading to even learning. When the Welsh Revival occurred in the days of Evan Roberts, it is said that taverns, bars and houses of ill repute were all transformed so that these places became meeting places to share and hear the Gospel. In fact their prison yards and cells became empty throughout the days of the Revival.

Today we need the same patience and the same prayer for our country to be transformed and changed. In the Bible, there are cases of Revivals that were led by godly kings such as Josiah, Jehoshapat and Hezekiah. In the case of Hezekiah the Revival came because he obeyed the voice of the Lord. He unlocked the bolted doors of the Temple of God which his own father has desecrated and restored those things his father has discarded and purified them through the priests and Levites.

“In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them into the square on the east. Then he said to them, "Listen to me, O Levites. Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place. "For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and have turned *their* backs. "They have also shut the doors of the porch and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or

offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. "Therefore the wrath of the LORD was against Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. "For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His burning anger may turn away from us. "My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burn incense." (2 Ch 29:3-11)

After doing the repair and cleansing the temple of the Lord King Hezekiah led the assembly of the princes of the city, the Priests and the Levites including the people: **"Then King Hezekiah arose early and assembled the princes of the city and went up to the house of the LORD"** (2Ch 29:20). What happened next was a Revival that swept the heart of Jerusalem. All of the people were surprised to find that once the Temple and worship was restored they all found themselves consecrating and making a vow of new life before the Lord. **"Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, because the thing came about suddenly"** (2 Ch 29:36).

Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials

ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped. Then Hezekiah answered and said, "Now *that* you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing *brought* burnt offerings. And the number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. And the consecrated things were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep. But the priests were too few, so that they were unable to skin all the burnt offerings; therefore their brothers the Levites helped them until the work was completed, and until the *other* priests had consecrated themselves. For the Levites were more conscientious to consecrate themselves than the priests. And there *were* also many burnt offerings with the fat of the peace offerings and with the libations for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of the LORD was established *again*. Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, because the thing came about suddenly." (2 Ch 29:29-36)

Once idolatry is rolled away we can expect God to bless us. Just as there was a leader who made himself available before the Lord and sought Him sincerely and repented of his father's sins and their sins, any leader who will perform the

same can certainly expect a visitation from the Lord. Let us take the events that transpired one by one. First, the king made himself available; second, he felt an inner conviction that the temple needs to be cleaned; third, he connected with the right people; fourth, he restored true worship in the temple and fifth he decreed assembly not just among those from Judah but also from those of Israel.

Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel (2 Ch 30:1).

Although this happened more than two thousand years ago, the principal lessons we can learn did not change. This is applicable to any kingdom, any government and any individual who wants the blessing of God in his life.

1. Make yourself available

Just as no revival happens by itself without a person God uses, He has chosen to work through anyone available that has His heart. In the case of King Hezekiah, he was convicted of how far they have fallen away from the Lord. It might even be that during his youth, he saw the need for Revival in their kingdom. This is the same conviction when one has a compassion for a country, a tribe or a company or a village which Jesus mentioned and repeated many times, “I have compassion of them.” With Hezekiah, once he was proclaimed king, he did not lose time to bring the needed

changes. He spoke with urgency... “Listen to me O Levites...consecrate yourselves NOW.” Are there urgent changes we need to make in our lives? In our families? In our nation? If God is convicting you to lead or be part of the leadership team to bring changes to a place or industry or school or company, wake up early and bring the changes immediately. The prophet Ezekiel wrote that the Lord is looking for someone to stand in the gap.

"And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (Eze 22:30).

Although this verse is often used as an example in intercessory teachings it nonetheless points to the fact that the Lord is looking for men and women to stand in the gap, to fill up the vacuum of need and ministry. In military governance, it is not the talented that will always be drafted to go and fight in the battlefield. It would be the person who is available. This is the way the Lord has worked before and it would always be. There are few Theologians who led a revival and more often, those who did were unknown to most people. These were men and women who sacrificed their lives for the agenda of God. Like the men of David who were hidden in the cave Adullam till the time they were released to fight for the Kingdom of David, these were selfless men and women who were content to be known by God and simply do His will.

“For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.” (1 Co 1:19-20, 26-29)

2. Prepare and consecrate yourself for your calling

When Hezekiah called an assembly to consecrate them, even before that, he had already prepared for the day it will come. His ability to organize things quickly is rooted in his foresight to prepare in advance. Above all, he prepared himself by walking closely with God. The Bible described him to be a person who “clung to the Lord” from the start to the end of his life. Ponder this. His father was an apostate, but he found a friend and mentor in the prophet Isaiah so that he walked in the ways of David. To think more of this, he did this very thing from the onset of his rule when he was still 25 years old. For a young king of this age, to accomplish such feat would mean he was endowed with wisdom and grace in order to

accomplish such. In fact, it was him who spearheaded the Assembly praying both for Israel and Judah, and

“For a multitude of the people, *even* many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification *rules* of the sanctuary." So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.”
(2 Ch 30:18-20)

In order to see a Revival coming to our place, company, school, organization and nation, we need men and women who are devoted to their call, preparing themselves for what God has called them to do. Even the apostle Paul is said to have prepared and sought his call from God (Gal 1:17). The main difference between star players, athletes, musicians and statesmen and leaders is not mainly because one has more resources than the other but rather of their devotion to practice and sharpening their skills. As Christians, God has called us to bear fruit and not only one but much fruit. This bearing of fruit encompasses more than the talents and money that we have or the values we cherish. It means in every area of our lives.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."You did not choose Me,

but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” (Joh 15:8,16)

We have to consecrate ourselves to our calling. If all the Christians in this world would resolve to do just that, it won't be long to see a Great Awakening in our land.

3. Connect to the right people

Connection matters. Our salvation depends on whether we are connected to the Head or we just connected ourselves to the Body. When we are connected to the Head, we are automatically connected to His universal Body. Right connection matters. In biology, without the integrated connection of the different body systems to the control center, the brain, there would be confusion and it may lead to abnormal functioning of the systems. We must know who we are in the Kingdom of God and what role we need to play. If we do this we lessen our competitiveness against each other and we start cooperating. A good connection means we become members of each other be it in local congregation or worship center wherever God sends us. Just as Hezekiah connected with the right mentor and people, we must ask the help of others and connect with them as mentors, friends, partners or local congregation and institution. The right connection is needed in order to see where we most fit and just as you don't plug a 110 volt to 250 volt socket, making the right connections ensures to get quality results. In Hezekiah,

we see a person who was willing to do everything so that a revival would come. He is a type of a restorer of the breach and homes to dwell in. Had Hezekiah connected only to the princes or authorities in Israel and Judah and bypassed the Priests and Levites, the result would have been different. This is a principle we need to learn if we want to make a difference in His church and in this world. There is no lone ranger and teamwork is a must even in bringing a revival.

4. Keep right with God

Aside from making our lives available for His service and devoting extra time for preparation and making the right connection with His people, it is of utmost importance to get connected to God. Every time Israel and Judah has a favorable leader with God, the people were also blessed. Whenever there was an evil leader, the people also suffer. The Bible declares that sin is a reproach to any people. The greatest ministry we can have here on earth is to keep on drawing near the Lord and to never forget that He is our first love. Freedom from idolatry comes when we are on fire for the love of the Lord.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to *any* people.” (Pro 14:34)

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (Jas 4:7-8)

5. Share the Good News

One of the most amazing things that could happen during a Revival is the spill-over effect it can have over the surrounding nations and villages. During the Reformation, it was not the leaders who propagated the right teachings alone; it was the common peasants who sat and listened with them who brought these new revelations beyond the border of where the leaders could travel and sermon. The Reformation could have stayed only in Germany or in England but thanks to the printing press and the people who moved books, fellowship and talk with each other. They were all agents of the Reformation so that it swept like a wild fire all over the continent. The great persecution in Jerusalem has the same effect of dispersing Christians and with this, they carried with them the new culture that they have and impacted the places which they adopted as their homes. During the Welsh Revival, the fire that burned in the tiny island of Wales proceeded to America in Los Angeles igniting the Azusa Street Revival. What little we know is that when it occurred it occurred because people from both sides of the Atlantic corresponded in letters and brought with them the good news of the Revival and which increased the fervor of believers in Los Angeles. When Hezekiah saw that the people were blessed by the Lord, he immediately announced and dispatched messengers to the neighboring Kingdom of Israel to come and celebrate with them the Pass Over of the Lord.

“Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should

come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month, since they could not celebrate it at that time, because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers, nor had the people been gathered to Jerusalem. Thus the thing was right in the sight of the king and all the assembly.” (2Ch 30:1-4)

This was one of the most unprecedented events in the history of Judah where King Hezekiah proclaimed an assembly not just in his own kingdom but also unselfishly shared the blessing they were experiencing. In our lives blessings are better shared and experienced with others. This is why we feel better when we give something away to others be it a donation, a food, love, service or simply sharing your moments of joy and laughter to a love one. This is the surge of joy we feel even during times of Revival because we will never be stronger than when we brought joy to the Lord. Bringing a Revival to a nation does not depend on a leader alone but a team from the choir or worship group to the preacher...God works through His body and that means everyone has a part to play. Revival points us to Jesus, away from ourselves, our own agenda and away from idolatry so that it brings unprecedented blessings to everyone.

Chapter 7

Murder in Jerusalem

After the reign of King Hezekiah, Judah suffered terribly under the hands of Manasseh by bringing them to err more than the heathen kingdoms before. He practiced all sorts of evil imaginable from idolatry, witchcraft, familiar spirits, astrology and erecting altars of abomination even in the temple of Solomon. **“So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, *and* to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken”** (2 Chron 33:9-10 KJV).

“For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with

wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.” (2 Ch 33:3-6)

If Hezekiah was a revivalist of the works of God, his very own son Manasseh was also a revivalist of the works of darkness. As much as God loved Hezekiah and used him wonderfully to bless the people of Israel, all his works were like platters grounded to dust by the way his son acted after his death. He reverted to the very evil whom his father has tried to completely eradicate and opened up a terrible curse to come upon Jerusalem and the people of God. There was reign of terror with blood filling the streets of Jerusalem from one end to another (2Ki 21:16). It was repugnant, debasing and wicked and the people have no choice but to run as far away as they can go. Although he later repented, Manasseh brought a curse and stumbling block on Jerusalem that only God's terrible punishment can do it away. Strange as it may, it baffles us to think that someone with a great and wonderful father such as Mannaseh would be so blood thirsty and evil. He was the total opposite of what Hezekiah had been. In Psychology we have what we call as reverse Psychology and this is running counter to what is usually prevailing in one family. For example, I often notice that pastors with great and extraordinary anointing can have children who are directly their opposite in every way. This begs us to question whether King Hezekiah had been a good father after all.

Today there are also many pastors around the world who have successful ministries but one or two of their children are

under the spells of darkness. Are we good teachers of others but not our own families? It seems paradoxical that these things do happen and it happens even to the most devoted Christian leaders. The prophet Samuel was faulted because his sons can be bribed with money. King David has to flee Jerusalem at one point in his life because his own son threatens to kill him. In modern ministry history, the Dr. John Lake has to regret that he had not spend as much time as he should have with his children. One of them, in his deathbed wished that he has his father by his side laying his hands upon him to heal him. And the same story can be retold of many others.

Leo Tolstoy once said that every happy family is alike and every unhappy family was unhappy in every way. Busyness can make us forget the most important people in our lives. We may build a wonderful ministry but what is that when the equivalent would be losing our very own families? A thousand times we hear of stories that leaders often have their children reared by others because of the demand of the work they have. Even so, I also noticed that parents who befriend and make up with their children for lost time have healthy relationships. In the case of King David who was a very busy person from waging wars to daily governance, he was able to rear a child who would be a king, beloved of the Lord. Although he had a large family, he was still able to spend time teaching Solomon and probably his other children (Pro 4:3). David may have learned the second time around after his mistakes in the upbringing of Adonijah and Absalom. In the

case of King Hezekiah, he may have been as busy as David was so that he was not really able to spend time with his children. It is written that in his later years he was even busier attending to his daily duties and touring around ambassadors from other nations because the Lord has blessed him so much.

“And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much.”

(2 Ch 32:27-29)

These verses show us how the Lord has blessed him so much that he even have to build storehouses for wine, corn, oil and stalls for his animals. It only confirms that he was busier than we thought and probably spent a few times alone with his children. If we contrast the two great kings, Hezekiah and David, he was not able to prepare well his successor compared to David. Most of the latter years of David were spent gathering gold and silver and timber for the temple that Solomon will build. David did well to prepare in advance his successor so that he won't sweat that big stuff. In contrast, Hezekiah although warned before to set his house in order (2

Ki 20:1) did not fully comply with the Lord. All those last 15 years of his life was probably spent building vast storehouses but it was a futile work because it was all undone by his successor whom he did not teach or prepare for the task ahead of him.

He may have been a great leader, successful minister, revivalist and military commander but his weakness in teaching his children proved to be a fiasco. And again the evil consequences of this were numerous. It was a big loophole by which the enemy came in like a flood to destroy the people of Jerusalem and eventually drag them to be exiled in faraway lands. We must never forget what the Lord has previously spoken to us or we will face consequences we may not like. God's revelations and words are like daily manna that nourishes our spirits and souls as food do to our bodies. His words nurture our lives so that we can live after the newness of life found in Him. If we forget His words, we are sure to misunderstand, misinterpret and misuse them just as it happened to King Hezekiah. He led his people well but not his own household. We must not be great leaders only to others but also with our families. Lead right, mentor others, and pass the baton well. There was no question in how Hezekiah led the nation in many trials and victories but to fail to mentor our very own children would be a sacrilege. This failure to discipline and prepare his successor cost everything of his good works and legacies. In Proverbs we find the Lord teaching us to discipline and train our children who are also our successors.

“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” (Pro 22:15)

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Pro 22:6)

Faith is contagious but it won't stick right to the foolish heart of children. They need to be led into that path of discipline and trained for the job they are called to be. Giving children something to do is not exploitation. It helps them to focus and to learn to channel their stored curiosities and creativities into what they are doing. By this way they are being prepared for a better future. A child who has not been allowed to work before almost always has problems in terms of focusing compared to a child who has been given works to do. Children whose parents spend more time teaching them are also much more secure and have a healthier outlook in life compared to those who are not. If only Hezekiah was as much concerned not only in building his storehouses but also the future of his successor, his previous works and revival would not have been wasted by his very own bloodline. This is the reason why we see one can be rich in the past and then his descendants are found scampering for money afterwards. This happens when we fail to teach those who will inherit our position, our job, our wealth or our estates. Indeed Hezekiah remains to be a great figure of history but his son could have reached even higher other than repenting for his evil acts near the end of his life. He could have ruled like a Solomon, beloved of the Lord. But the failure of his father to mentor

him brought his life to be rolling with great evil.

Thus, pastor's children need not always to fall on the sidelines, forgotten and doing nothing except watching their parents go from house to house. In the end our failure to teach our very own children and train them in their calling would either cost us our vision or our legacy as what happened to Hezekiah...The very idolatry he has removed far from their midst, his very son brought it back. Freedom from idolatry should be more meaningful if we all bring our family members in the Lord and teach them His ways. Good posterity comes not by wishing but by planning and teaching your children and grandchildren the ways of the Lord. This is why Jesus and Paul did not only preach to crowds but trained individuals and protégés who could themselves reproduce (2Tim2:2). The best discipleship we can ever have is to disciple our very own families.

Chapter 8

Every action has a consequence

Every action has a corresponding meaning and significance. Whether we do that by intention or we have done it irresponsibly. Our decisions will either have positive or negative repercussions. It will reverberate throughout eternity. Just take the miscalculation of Sarah and Abraham, both would like to have a child and by cultural practice they can decide to have one by getting a concubine for Abraham. Both have heard from the mouth of God the promised child that they would have. They waited for 5 years but no child has come yet. Another 5 years passed and another, then they began to question God's timing and ways to bring the child. And finally they were able to figure out. How about helping God bring the baby into this world? Wouldn't that be crazy?

Tired of waiting, agitated and full of doubts, Sarah asked Abraham to get Hagar and impregnate her so that they can have a baby by her. But did God want it this way? No! The promise was for a child to come from the loins of Abraham and Sarah and not from another woman. They tried to bring about the promise of God through carnal reasoning and it brought a carnal child whose descendants were prophesied to be critical of everyone and everyone will be critical against them.

The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. "And he will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers." (Gen 16:11-12)

And indeed until now, this prophecy has not failed. In every way, the Arab people has been criticized and suspected of their religion, race, origin and motives. They have been critical of many other nations from calling the United States as Satan to calling Israel as many thousand derogatory words as they could think of. Yet God has not forgotten the Arabs or the Ishmaelites. He has blessed them because of Abraham. It would do us well if we learn to decide wisely in everything we do. Abraham's impatience to wait for the promised child cost them not only heart ache but even to this both of his descendants are fighting each other in a tiny piece of land.

Setting boundaries

Our heavenly father has imposed restrictions and made regulations that are not burdensome or harmful to us. These are boundaries He has set for us to live peacefully and orderly with our neighbors. If we cross this line, we are bound to fall and reap its consequences just as what happened to a good king who lived more than two thousand years ago. King Uzziah was the cousin of prophet Isaiah; he was a zealous king, energetic and dynamic, always eager to obey God's

directives. He built many cisterns for the people and for his livestock. He also built fortresses and prepared an elite army of 307,500 with another extra regiment of 2,600 ultra elite warriors. With his own self designed war engines and equipment, he repelled the Philistines. In short he is one of the ablest military generals of his time. One day while going inside the temple to commune with the Lord, he run out of control and crossed the line for what is a work supposed to be for priests. Out of his religious zeal, he tried to burn incense for the Lord. Then finally he found himself moving out, a leprous person.

“But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. And they opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful, and will have no honor from the LORD God." But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he *was* leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out

of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him.” (2 Ch 26:16-20)

King Uzziah did not finish well his glorious reign. He had it all. But his discontent and impatience to wait for the priests in burning incense before the Lord cost him everything. He was a seeker of God but one unguarded moment of pride brought all these things to nothing. If we look at verse 16, it says, “But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly.” His strength and power became a stumbling block that blinded him from paying respects to the office of other people. In such cases, God made a swift judgment. What happened to the great king?

The name Uzziah means strength. And it does not merely denote a simple muscular strength but it means, “strength of God”. King Uzziah’s reign was marked with the strength and character of God. The people were happy and blessed because of the peace and stability that he brought during his reign. But when he allowed his strength and power to supersede the power of God in his life, it destroyed him. **“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (2Ch 26:16 KJV)**. When he allowed pride to supersede the strength of God in His life, he was meted with destruction . Pride is the single attitude that God hates.

“Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.” (Pro 16:5)

**“Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.”
(Pro 16:18)**

“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (Jas 4:6-8)

Clearly, if we are a friend of God we must detest pride because He hates it. If we truly love God we will love what He loves such as humility, the widows, the prisoners, and the afflicted and to keep ourselves unspotted from this world. We will also hate what he hates such as, pride, arrogance, foul mouth and subtlety. We cannot be a friend of God and do otherwise.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27 KJV)

“The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” (Prov 8:13 KJV)

If we are to be strong in one area, it is in the area of humility. If only Uzziah did not meddle with the business of the priests, he could have been one of the best remembered kings of Judah. Sometimes our own strength and wisdom brings us to the grave. This should be a warning to all of us to walk clothed in humility just as Jesus Christ did when He walked the earth. He was God clothed in human form and as if this was not enough, He humbled Himself even more by coming as a servant and not a ruler.

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

The apostle Paul says, “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”in short, he was telling us to have this attitude which was also in Jesus...the attitude of humility. Walking in humility draws us nearer to God. There is no greater purpose for our existence on earth than to simply being with Him. Even our gifts and callings are secondary to this. God made man for the purpose of fellowship. Humility allows us to hear from God. It allows us to be teachable enough to learn from Him. Pride is the very opposite of humility. When one is shrouded with pride, he cannot receive correction from others. Neither will he hear it. This is the

main difference between Christians who can seat alone in an empty church and yet could hear the whisper of God from those who would simply leave because they think God is not there. It is pride to not listen when others are speaking. It is also pride to not serve the younger or the weaker or the elderly. It is still pride when we think highly of ourselves and prioritize our own agenda over others. It is also pride when we leave a church because we think they are not good enough for us. It is still pride when you think you are better than others because of your degree or experience. What is the point? Pride is nothing, humility is everything. Because all that we have received and will receive were by His grace alone, **“for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45 KJV).**

King Uzziah’s punishment of leprosy is an embodiment of what pride can do to a person. It desensitizes our hearts from hearing rightly from the Lord. The authority in the temple were the Priests and not the King; neither was Miriam in authority over Moses so both King Uzziah and Miriam ran into a serious error by crossing the line not offered to them. This was unmistakable because pride can marr and blur correct discernment. It blinds us hindering our sense of vision and hearing.

The only thing one can do to a proud person is to leave that person because he won’t hear anything. Additionally, pride has the nasty habit of subtlety so that we cannot discern it

completely until it has already entrenched itself well behind us. One time while doing a research in Hong Kong and watching one of my friends fall flat on his butt on the rock platform, I thought, “I have not fallen once to this rock.” A few minutes passed and I stumbled on the rock platform with my forehead hitting the rock and cutting my lips. That afternoon I gave my presentation with a swollen bleeding lip and a painful head. Pride can come in many ways and in many forms upon us. In fact even our religion and our affiliation can become prides that may cross the line between a healthy pride and an evil one. Let us take good care to always be covered with humility in all things we do even while in our secular jobs.

Chapter 9

Opposing God

Can we really oppose God? Can we really try to fight God? The answer is a resounding yes! People can become haughty enough to oppose God. The Pharisees were members of the spiritual ruling class in Israel whose primary calling was to teach the people the knowledge of God and to keep His law. But when they saw the Word of God face to face in Jesus Christ, they only saw the carpenter in His body. The very Son of God whom they professed that they worship came near and dwelt among them but none of them recognized Him. This must have been one of the greatest paradoxes of all time. People can be so lost in seeing the details that the very whole structure was missed. The peasants, prostitutes, the sick and the poor, the leprous and the tax collectors did recognize Him and honored Him as their Savior, Messiah, King, Mentor, Teacher and Healer. But the most schooled and wise among them failed to see one bit of the Messiah in Him or even the Word of God in Him. The very ones who said they were the custodians of faith, the fighters of heresy and the watchers of the Messiah saw only a carpenter when He passed by them. No wonder Jesus Himself has to denounce them with the severest recorded in the Scriptures, **“Woe to you blind guides... Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye**

generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matt 23:31-33 KJV)." What happened? Why would these Pharisees and Sadducees resist the very God whom they were trying to study in the Scriptures? The Pharisees can be considered to be orthodox in their beliefs and views in the Scriptures, they believe in God, they believe in the Resurrection of the dead while the Sadducees do believe in God but not in the Resurrection or in angels or demons (Matt 22:23; Acts 23:6). Thus, both the camps of the orthodox and the liberal people resisted Jesus when He came down to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. The main reason can be found in this verse, **"When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Mat 7:28-29).** It is found in His authority.

The Pharisees were offended of Him because they only consider him to be common carpenter from Nazareth and yet he was teaching. Day by day the number of his following keeps increasing. These spiritual rulers became jealous of his following. Did He take the entire congregation from Judea, Galilee, Jordan and Syria? The Pharisees felt threatened of their status in the society seeing Jesus has a following that is increasing daily. He discerned their thoughts, **"wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?" (Matt. 9:4).** The pride of life, their position in the society and their stance made them blind before the very Son of God whose words they proposed to adorn in every way.

The religious spirit

This kind of attitude shows a religious spirit which we have been unmasking before. This spirit seeks to bring Israel into false worship by causing them to bow down before idols, use astrology and witchcraft and propagate demon-worship among the people. It was the same spirit that Abraham, Jacob and Moses and Joshua resisted in the Promise Land. Every time there was an evil king in the Promise Land, the people of God suffer and are brought into bondage. After the righteous reign of Hezekiah, the people of Judah experienced two evil kings who descended from King Hezekiah. Then his great grandson King Josiah reigned and sought the Lord of his father David, **“For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Ch 34:3)**. It is surprising to note that even though David and Hezekiah were righteous kings, both of them had sons and grandsons who turned evil. Although their children and grandchildren decided to commit those lawless acts, sometimes there is a deeper reason beyond making choices for sons and grandsons to be evil. In fact Solomon walked in righteousness during his earlier years except that he chose to disobey God by marrying many women totaling to a thousand. But from the very start, Manasseh decided to walk in the path of evil and made Jerusalem a slaughterhouse of innocent people from righteous priests to prophets and ordinary citizens.

It is therefore important to build our families on strong foundations teaching them about God’s covenant and the

exploits of His servants on earth...how they served God and how they won over their problems. Mercy triumphs over judgment and redemption is not too late. No matter how evil Manasseh had been, the Lord gave him a second chance (2 Ch 33:12) and it is written that he was one of Jesus' ancestors (Matt 1:10).

Idolatry however remains to be a top problem from the ancient to our times. Today we don't see people offering sacrifices to gods and goddesses under every green tree or mountain top but the battle against idolatry has become the battle for the hearts of our children and our people. It has taken a more subtle form but it is the same spirit which tried to hijack the plans of God for Israel and which tries to do the same for the Church. We can confront idolatry by doing the same undertaking and resolve that the righteous kings of Israel did. This is the story of overcomers like Hezekiah and Josiah who were kings of destiny and righteousness and who ordered their lives by seeking the Lord early: **“while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David”**.

King Josiah's works

King Josiah is said to have removed idolatry with the same or even greater zeal than his great grandfather Hezekiah or David. He purged Jerusalem from the high places, the Asherim, carved and molten images. They removed the altars of Baal and ground to powder all the molten and carved images then he burned the bones of the priests of Baal and after that he also re-opened and repaired the House of the Lord.

“They tore down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered *it* on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Then he burned the bones of the priests on their altars and purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins, he also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images into powder, and chopped down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah an official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God.” (2 Ch 34:4-8)

This seemed to happen so fast but it actually occurred in two phases. First, when he was 20 years old he began his quest to free Jerusalem from idolatry; second, he also began the repair of the temple when he was 26 years old. He cleaned and repaired the temple in Jerusalem and restored true worship among his people so that revival followed all his campaigns: **“Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God.**

Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following

the LORD God of their fathers” (2 Ch 34:33). Such amazing feat of a young King who made a difference in his life and the life of his people by seeking the God of his fathers and wrecking great havoc to satan’s kingdom will forever be remembered for his righteousness like King David. God’s hatred on idolatry cannot be described in a mere simplistic term, but the Bible uses a special word for every sin which carries a greater hatred and a greater weight of judgment; God calls it abomination. These are some of the examples of sins which are declared as abomination in the New American Standard Bible but there are more in the King James Version:

'You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. (Lev 18:22)

"A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deu 22:5)

"The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. You shall not bring an abomination into your house, and like it come under the ban; you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is something banned. (Deu 7:25-26)

'Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image,

an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.' (Deu 27:15)

Abominations include homosexuality or sexual intercourse of the same sex. And homosexuality has its own variant such as women trying to be men and men trying to be women. Another is worship of gods and goddesses besides the one true God (you do not need to go to India to find about this, just visit a Hindu temple or read an article on Hinduism and you will know it). All of these are sins and abominations in Christian theology but which many psychologists may term as problems only. Is rooted in our failure to understand or reach to the one true God. This failure is evident in the writings of the prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah who were particularly called to prophesy against the apostasy of Israel.

“Saying to a stock, Thou *art* my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned *their* back unto me, and not *their* face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where *are* thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for *according to* the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. Wherefore will ye plead with me? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD.” (Jer 2:27-29 KJV)

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6 KJV).

This failure to worship and understand the one true God leads to a devastating worship of the creation. This happens fast among those involved in the occult, New Age and other false religions. Idolatry leads to a worship of the creation.

A primary battlefield

This primary battle between light and darkness in the history of Israel continued even during the time of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was a great preacher his sermons are heard and much anticipated by the people so that even Herod is afraid of him. God send him to testify to the greatest light of all in order to prepare the people for His coming (Matt 3:4).

“There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” (Joh 1:6-9)

But beyond this, the Pharisees were nosing all around and asking him if He was the One whom they were waiting for. He bluntly replied he was not and that He who will come will be baptizing the people with spirit and fire. Some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came and asked for his baptism but he rebuked them and said they were vipers who should repent and produce fruits met for repentance. They cannot fool God. They thought the act of baptism can save them. No, it was not

but by repentance showing in a changed life (Matt 3:8).

These leaders who profess to be leading the flocks of Israel to the throne of God were actually ravenous wolves deep inside. They teach the law but they themselves do not practice it. Righteousness has become a ritual and tradition, merely symbolic in actual performance. In the wild wolves are known to devour the weak and the sick as well as to scavenge for dead carcass. Wolves are ferocious animals that can turn a flock of sheep into a yard of empty bones. They profess to teach the precepts of God, but in fact they take advantage of the people and milk them with their moneys and nurse them with lies. John the Baptist called them a brood of vipers.

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Mat 3:7-8)

Beyond this, Jesus described them as hypocrites reserving the greatest denunciation to the Pharisees and Sadducees saying, **"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN'" (Mat 15:7-9).** When we do God a mere lip service and our ways contradict with what we are saying, we are

playing religion. And this is the way of the Pharisees, to play it the best they can. This spirit of religiosity which has lodged among the Pharisees was sent from hell to bring the people of Israel to another form of bondage and captivity; to a system run by traditions and false worship. If the Pharisees have given their lives to the study of the Word of God, they would have been able to understand that John the Baptist was the messenger whom God will be bringing first before the Messiah finally comes.

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. "And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."
(Mal 4:5-6)

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: **"BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'" John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mar 1:2 -4)**

Hell has been preparing for the appearance of the Son of God and sent their most powerful forces to thwart the plans of God. But as hell mustered all its forces towards Israel, God

has also sent His most powerful messenger to prepare the hearts of the people for their Messiah. John's preaching and sermons ploughed the hearts of the people so that they were readied for the appearance of the Son of God in their midst. When finally John the Baptist made known himself, **"I am not the One,"** the messengers and agents of the Pharisees breathed for relief.

"Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ,

John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

1"And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." So with many other exhortations also he preached the gospel to the people." (Luke 3:15-18)

Just as in those times you can only be either pro Pharisee or a follower of Jesus, in this battlefield there can be no neutrality. We are either promoting heaven and fighting the great darkness of our times or simply watching comfortably with the modern Pharisees. We can fight for the Kingdom of Light or side with darkness. Our lives will speak where we are sided to. Religiosity can come in various forms and I would like to

emphasize four points based on the ways of the Pharisees. First, a religious person lives in idolatry; second, a religious person will always persecute what he cannot understand; third, a religious person walks in pride; and fourth, a religious person bases his faith on traditions and the precepts of men.

1. Idolatry

When we are afflicted with the spirit of religiosity, more likely we base our faith with what we see outside and not by what we discern. We become judgmental and full of criticism on others. The religious person is bound in this world and could not discern the ways of the Spirit of God. True faith is founded in God; its foundation is secure because Jesus is the foundation. The Pharisees lived in idolatry by way of cherishing the precepts of men more than the precepts of God. They value their tradition more than what the tradition really means. The spiritual values represented by the feasts were not given as much emphasize as the celebration itself. This enraged Jesus Christ and denounced them as hypocrites when they criticized that His disciples were eating with unclean hands. Cleansing according to Him starts from the inside out, it begins with a change in the heart. This was a new concept to the Pharisees who taught the literal meaning of cleaning and underemphasized what God was really looking at. They were clean and probably so clean that not even microbes could stay for a night in their vestments. But then, they missed the whole point of being followers of the Word. They forgot to ask whether God was still in their midst or if they have Him in their hearts.

Idolatry did not sink in overnight among the Israelites but it came through little compromises that they made through wrong decisions and failure to ask God. It is always wise to ask God's help or a Christian brother with high integrity when we do not know the way. We cannot pretend to know it all or otherwise we will fall.

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (Jas 1:5)

2. Persecution

Next, they persecuted Jesus Christ whom they profess they were waiting for. Because of their inability to understand the Lord and His ways, the Pharisees and Sadducees found themselves opposing the very Word of God. A religious person tends to always persecute the people who disagree with him. Although Jesus Christ has never persecuted one Pharisee, they kept on trying Him in order to find fault with Him. One of the most memorable I can cite was when they asked whether there was a need to pay taxes or not.

"Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But He detected their trickery and said to them, "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were unable to

catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent. (Luk 20:22-26)

In the Law of Moses, there was no direct order to pay taxes to the government but this was practiced by the Romans to fund war campaigns and maintain infrastructures. In the prophets, Samuel particularly told the Israelites that they should beware for asking God a king because he will exact them wages and taxes for his kingdom (1 Sam 8:15-17). The answer of Jesus was clever to the point and arrested the doubts of the mockers. Persecutions come many times not just in the days of Jesus but even at the present. Most of the time our inability to understand someone can evoke a foreign feeling that becomes antagonistic to that person creating mistrust and evil thoughts. Persecutions are rooted in our ability to tolerate and understand others. When the Pope felt threatened by Martin Luther and the Reformers he tried to persecute them and antagonize their efforts by using propaganda and killing the Protestants as heretics. Inside the Protestant movement, Martin Luther, when he failed to come in agreement with John Calvin persecuted many Calvinists. And even both Protestants and Catholics alike persecuted the Anabaptists because of failure to agree in some points of their long held beliefs. A religious spirit can therefore bring division and destruction by having us focused on our petty doctrines and not on the Son of God so that we keep on destroying each other. There are countless stories of anointed ministries today which do the same because another servant displays more power and more

following.

All of these bring a curse into the ministry that everyone does not like of. We are all brothers and sisters no matter what color of skin we have, what name of ministry we belong to or whether we have been given a healing anointing or a prophetic anointing. The call is for us to reach out and not to kill each other. When the Pharisees and the Sadducees succumbed to this evil spirit, they tried to destroy each other and then to destroy Jesus Christ. Martin Luther is one of the most influential reformers but he also persecuted Anabaptists including John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli. So this spirit of religiosity does not only reside in the Catholic Church but even among Protestant believers. It is a spirit that tries to bring havoc as large and as painful as possible by turning us away from the one true God.

3. Pride

The Pharisees walked in pride. Whether they knew it or not, what we can observe from the Scriptures show that they were blind of who they were opposing. The humble peasants and fishermen saw Jesus as God but these blind guides saw only the carpenter. Our most valuable commodity is to remain firm, open and humble to God. It is the attitude of humility that will bring us home to God's arms. We can be strong one day and the next limping around and seemingly helpless so the need to remain humble and open. We are indeed imperfect beings in our present states but God renews our spirits day by day according to His image. It is therefore imperative to walk

in humility so that we can continue our journey without becoming a stumbling block or being ditched. All knowledge and wisdom originates from God and this is marked by what is pure, peaceful, gentle, merciful, sincere, impartial, full of good fruits, unwavering and always compassionate. The fruit of such wisdom always display righteousness. So when someone comes next to you and tells you he will blow himself up or shoot the president, the senator or to kill a Jew, this person is sensual, demonic and filled with evil intentions.

“For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” (Jas 3:16-18 KJV)

“For where envy and rivalry are, there also are unrest and every vile deed. The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceful, courteous, not self-willed, full of compassion and kind actions, free from favoritism and from all insincerity. And peace, for those who strive for peace, is the seed of which the harvest is righteousness.” (Jas 3:16-18 WNT)

Humility enables us to receive the grace of God in our lives without which no one would be able to stand. We only fall because the Lord has removed the grace where we stand. This

should be a warning to us that no one is free from falling. From the least of the saints to the greatest of the saints...we are all susceptible of falling. Again a haughty spirit and a boastful mouth can bring us to the grave earlier than needed.

“But He gives more abundant grace, as is implied in His saying, "GOD SETS HIMSELF AGAINST THE HAUGHTY, BUT TO THE LOWLY HE GIVES GRACE." Submit therefore to God: resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”(Jas 4:6-8 WNT)

This was the very reason why Jesus called the Pharisees wicked because they all walk in haughtiness or pride. When we walk in pride, we won't hear God speaking to us anymore because a prideful man is filled with himself. Disobedience to God makes us susceptible to pride and this is the very reason why Adam and Eve fell. Both of them thought that they can be more than what God has made them already. They ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil because they thought it can make them wiser than God. When we live in sin, we live contrary to God. We will find ourselves doing the very evil spoken in the Scriptures which further separates us from God. This is why sinners cannot hear the voice of God even when they pray. Nevertheless, God give us all a second chance and it will never be too late to find comfort in God's abiding love and forgiveness. He says,

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”(James 5:19-20 KJV)

“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”(Jas 4:10 WNT)

“A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.”(Pro 29:23 KJV)

“He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way.”(Psa 25:9)

“But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” (Psa 37:11)

“When God arose to judgment, To save all the humble of the earth. (Psa 76:9)

"But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”(Isa 66:2)

4. Traditions of men

Sometimes, the traditions and precepts of men are brought higher than the Scriptures and this literally happened not just in Israel but even during the Middle Ages when the authority

of the Pope became infallible and the Scriptures were hidden so that only the monks and the priests can read. The terrible darkness that swept Europe during those days can only be likened in thrice the effect of a recession such as the years of depression in the United States and Europe. But even then there is still hope to uphold the people because Bibles are available to read and comfort ourselves with compared in those times when no Scriptures were available for the common people and only bare necessities exists.

With the impact of the Reformation, everything was changed. The Bible was first translated in German by Martin Luther and William Tyndale translated it in English for the people of England. By bringing the Reformation to the people, the oppressive yoke of the Pope was broken and the Age of Reason was birthed. According to writers of this age, they emerged from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by Reason and Science. Thus, the freedom of worship brought also freedom to the human will because where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom!

The Reformation virtually impacted everything from the religious structure of the day to the civil governance and daily public life. It emphasized the freedom of the individual to choose and the personal faith to believe in the Lord. It demolished many long held lies and myths propagated by the Catholic Church from the infallibility of the Pope, veneration of the saints and Mary, doctrines of purgatory and indulgences. It broke the monolithic tyranny of the Pope and

the Catholic Church so that people became more discerning and followed only the precepts found in the Bible. Every single doctrine and practice can only be decided using the Word of God as the sole authority. Even if we discount all the other impacts of the Reformation, the single biggest contribution would remain, Bible in the hands of the peasants. By doing this, the people would be freed from every misconceptions and lies that the Pope imposed on them. This eventually led to every other human freedom we now take for granted. This was the same as fulfilling the Law, Jesus Christ became personal again and dwelt among the people by His Word. In similar manner, the great darkness Israel was experiencing during the times when Jesus came to visit them was being propagated by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They taught the people laws which they themselves could not obey frustrating many people from following God so that when John the Baptist appeared many followed him because he taught with genuine authority and taught them the Kingdom of God. Jesus did the same and denounced the Pharisees.

"And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? For instance, God says, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.' But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.' In this way, you say they don't need to honor their

parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition.

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'" (Matt 15:3-9 NLT)

**"Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!
"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!**

You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity.

Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed." (Matt 23:24-29 NLT)

We must remember that when we disregard the Word of God and do not teach His whole counsel we not only dishonor Him but we become a lawless one. Our cause is worth dying for and to hold on to traditions of men that are not even sacred to God is one of the most foolish a person can fall into. All the things that we need to know as guidelines for living are already found in the Bible. We must never try to make His word of no effect by making our traditions and beliefs higher than His very words. In fact His words have more weight and power than all that is found in the Universe because He breathed life in them.

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39 KJV)

“For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb 4:12 KJV)

Chapter 10

The Pride of Religion

If you are a Christian and have tried sharing the Gospel to an unbeliever, it was more likely that you have been asked about the Christian monopoly of salvation. Why does your God hold only the answer to salvation? Isn't it that even our god can save us too? In this chapter let us discuss once more about pride and religion. Pride can take many forms but the ultimate manifestation of pride is worship of oneself like satan did (Ezek 37). The Word of God also declares that the world would come to an end and begin the era of the beast. It is also written that the beast would cause all people to worship him by coercion and tagging them with his powerful chips implanted in their foreheads and right hands (Rev 13:4, 16). This beast who will eventually come and rule the world is the ultimate manifestation of the pride of man.

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.* (2Th 2:3-4)

As we have been discussing, God wants us to worship Him in order to be free and to know the truth. He loves us because

He does. He has no other motives other than for our own good and safety in everything He does. In the case of satan, he wants followers in order to worship him and he does this out of conceit. This brings us to a conclusion that the devil wants worship from men because he wanted to be the god of man. He wants to in order to take what is rightly for God, our allegiance, our love and our freedom. He only wants to bring bondage and destruction to man (Joh 10:10). Individuals in bondage seem to be free outside but are in fact slaves of evil desire. When we obey evil desires, we become enslaved by it. Alcoholics are alcoholics because they have become slaves of alcohol. Smokers are smokers because they have become slaves of tobacco. Drug addicts are people enslaved by their cravings of mind altering drugs. So are the homosexuals. They have been enslaved by their evil desires and even proclaim it to be normal. This happens when the ultimate fall comes into effect...the creation worships another creation.

“For when they had come to know God, they did not give Him glory as God nor render Him thanks, but they became absorbed in useless discussions, and their senseless minds were darkened. While boasting of their wisdom they became utter fools, and, instead of worshipping the imperishable God, they worshipped images resembling perishable man or resembling birds or beasts or reptiles. For this reason, in accordance with their own depraved cravings, God gave them up to uncleanness, allowing them to dishonour their bodies among themselves with impurity. For they had bartered

the reality of God for what is unreal, and had offered divine honours and religious service to created things, rather than to the Creator--He who is forever blessed. Amen. This then is the reason why God gave them up to vile passions. For not only did the women among them exchange the natural use of their bodies for one which is contrary to nature, but the men also, in just the same way--neglecting that for which nature intends women--burned with passion towards one another, men practising shameful vice with men, and receiving in their own selves the reward which necessarily followed their misconduct. And just as they had refused to continue to have a full knowledge of God, so it was to utterly worthless minds that God gave them up, for them to do things which should not be done. Their hearts overflowed with all sorts of dishonesty, mischief, greed, malice. They were full of envy and murder, and were quarrelsome, crafty, and spiteful.” (Rom 1:21 WNT)

Beloved, the Lord is seeking true worshippers (Joh 4:23). The only thing we can do to avoid this darkness of mind and heart is to seek the only solution which is found in Jesus. I once have a toy car with a label that says, “If Jesus Christ is the answer, what is the question?” True life and passion begins when we have found Jesus as our ultimate quest in this life. The only way to stop this worship of the creation is to worship the God of the creation. True worship is giving yourself to God, not anymore as a lamb or ox to be burned but as a living sacrifice. What can be more glorious than to

walk and to live our lives as a living sacrifice for Him?

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:1-2)

To be a living sacrifice means to live our lives in conformity to His Words and commands. We begin by loving God and loving our neighbor. Jesus was once asked how to love a neighbor and He told a parable which teaches us how to love our neighbor. In this parable, there was a man wounded on the streets and many others passed him by, until a Samaritan came and took the wounded and left him into the care of another because he is into some business in Jerusalem. Being a good neighbor does not only mean helping the sick, wounded or the homeless or sharing the gospel to them. It can also be as small as being careful to not disturb them when they are already resting or being sensitive to provide for their needs.

The problem with a living sacrifice is it can also become a l-e-a-v-i-n-g sacrifice. We must learn to deny ourselves and die daily as even the apostle Paul and many others practiced. Sometimes we may have needs but when our neighbor's needs are more urgent than us, we can give way for them. From allowing them to a clear drive way to inviting them to a church

dinner or specials, these are simple ways we can impact our neighborhoods. The way to do this is to ask the Lord to grant us the grace to walk and see the way He walks and sees. That He may open our hearts and minds to His Holy Spirit and that we may hear Him. When we remove God in our minds, hearts and society, the vacuum will be filled quickly by the devil.

Blindness

I have discussed blindness already but I wanted to emphasize how it can come to a person during his walk. Blindness of truth can come when we claim to understand when in fact we don't know anything at all. This arrogant attitude brings a doorway to pride that brings the Lord's confrontation. The Pharisees were blind simply because the Lord can't touch people whose attitudes are saying they know more than God does. The Lord's warning upon them must be taken heed to. **“For judgment I am come into this world that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39)**. Thus, this is the reason why it is so hard for the Lord to minister to this type of people. They can really repel you and you would want to run away from them. Have you met a prideful person? Surely he sounds higher than he is, and it repulses you!

Saul, the persecutor

If in these days we are experiencing so much paranoia about terrorists, we must look back and see how the Lord dealt with one of them before. Before Osama Bin Laden came to be,

there was a Pharisee whose name was Saul. He was exceedingly highly educated from the Bible to the ways of the Pharisees. Because of his zeal, he was tasked to exterminate the Christians. We can see this kind of spirit working among the terrorists today who are so zealous to kill the Jews and anyone who obstruct their plans. He wrecked much destruction among the Christians and as persecution arose, he imprisoned fathers, mothers and even children who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was relentless in his mission to kill the leaders of the Christian Church in Jerusalem so that the Christians were all running away to nearby cities. One of the first leaders murdered was the powerful deacon Stephen. Saul saw Stephen die and he heard him utter these words before them all: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Act 7:60). Most probably Saul thought, "You fool, die! You don't know what you are talking! Blasphemer! Blasphemer"! By this act he has made himself the most feared name among the Christians and the sweetest name among the Pharisees. He has in fact led a "great wave of persecution" in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Probably no one can deny Saul could have been one of the most zealous people of the sect of Pharisees during his time and one of the most bound in his religious fervor. And out of this, in the name of religion he showed no mercy at all to his enemies – he dragged both men and women going from house to house inquiring if they believe in Jesus or not. He has left thousands of orphans in Jerusalem and the nearby cities. One time, while on another mission of killing spree, he was struck

and blinded by a strong light. “As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and heard a voice...” (Acts 9:3). He fell down from his horse and heard the voice of the One he has been persecuting. He was literally blinded by the light and has to remain so for a time. There are lessons we need to understand in this encounter of Saul and the Light of the world.

First, Saul has to be literally struck by light and blinded to see! The falling down to the ground symbolizes a turning of his world. He was humbled! As we have discussed earlier when you claim to see and actually you don't, you are blind. People who are religious need God's light to shine upon them. It is His light that will shine upon their minds and hearts so that they will understand. And that entails humility on their part to receive this. Saul was never forced. His horse stumbled with the brightness of the light he and his horse encountered. But this did not convert him. He was converted when he heard for himself Jesus Christ speaking. He heard the firm and loving voice of the Master, how that this Jesus is in fact real and alive!

Beloved, to confront people alone or tell the truth to them will not suffice. It will require God's love to do a healing inside the hearts of these people in bondage. This is why we need to tell the truth out of love and not out of compulsion or obligation. Just as Jesus set Saul free and turned him to one of the greatest Apostles of all time, religious people have that potential. By loving them, God can use us to minister truths

that can heal and set them free. But this requires time and commitment so we must endeavor from the very beginning to give time. When we encounter such, we should not retreat. The Lord never gave up on Saul so we must have the same determination and focus to never give up on just few occasions of rejection. For as the Lord set Saul free, he can set free even the most hardened sinner and turn him to a Paul. It only requires love. Much love indeed so that we would need to ask from God Himself.

Chapter 11

A deep healing love

The Old Testament is filled with examples where those involved in the occult, witchcraft, and other idolatrous workings were commanded by the Lord to be killed. That happens in the Old Testament because it shows the Law of God. The fulfillment of the Law of God however is the love of Jesus Christ realized through His grace and truth (Jn 1:17). It is by demonstrating His love on the cross that Jesus saved the world and disarmed the evil one. It is also by demonstrating this love to others that they will be won. The Lord loves all mankind and has not limited His outreach to the Jews only. This is because God's love is inclusive and cannot be limited by race, creed or nationality. As we have learned that the religious spirit seeks to bring us into bondage, the Spirit of God leads us to liberty so that we can worship Him freely. How do we deal with this religious spirit? Yes, there is a way but sorry to disappoint mathematicians that the formula is not made up of equations. It's the WAY and the TRUTH and the LIFE. Sounds simple? Yes the way is not a formula of equations but a Person we need to know to gain utmost freedom. It can be as simple as that. When King Saul ruled Judah and Israel, he ruled with peace and even outlawed sorcerers, spiritists and mediums. But when he fell because of impatience and disobedience, he was eventually found looking for guidance in a medium, a fitting end to those who veer

away from God (1 Samuel 13:10; 28:9). In contrast, David who always sought God was given the honor to have the Messiah come in his line. The religious gains nothing in the end while the true worshippers of God get everything from eternal life to blessings in this life. In the end the spirit of religiosity brings division, and focuses us to ourselves bringing ruin to the house of God. To overcome we need to have a strategy that systematically removes this from our midst. Even so there can only be one answer and that is to abide in the simplicity of fellowship with the Lord. This is our quest, to be one with Jesus and be His dwelling place.

1. Leaving things behind

When we became Christians, we were born again. No other word could better describe this experience so that we have a whole life made new again. The King James Version says we were made a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). This means we have a new appetite, a new perspective, a new battle cry, a new master and commander, a new handbook to live by, a new mission, and a new calling. Yet, we also carry with us some weights of the past. To overcome that, the Apostle Peter wrote, “Bring them all to Jesus” (I Peter 5:7). Moreover we are to renew our minds by studying His Word (Eph. 4:23) which washes away the evil thoughts and desires that are thrown at us daily. As we endeavor to do all of these, we ask the Lord to help us forget the past and move forward in our calling in Christ. We ask Him to cover it with His blood. Above all we ask Him the grace to stand and not fall on them again.

2. Cast away your idols

Like Achan, we endanger the whole body of Christ ignorantly by keeping sinful things with us. That includes not only things that were used in criminal activities or used in demon worship such as in the occult or witchcraft but more importantly we cast out our bitterness, unforgiveness and rage for through these we gave foothold to the devil (Eph. 4:27). The Lord revealed to me that all of these constitute the unfruitful works of darkness that we must remove in our midst and expose to light (Eph. 5:11). Want to know some? Here's the shortlist:

1. Novels that patronize sin and death – horror, romance; ungodly novels can bring us to bondage and evil imaginations.
2. Movies that patronize witchcraft – That includes your Harry Potter, Zenki, Pokemon and others.
3. Movies and literature that say it is alright to have sex even when you are not married
4. Things of the past that symbolizes sinful relationship that include your ex bf's lustful letters, watches, gifts, etc.
5. Things of the past that were dedicated to witchcraft or demon worship; that include gifts, pendants, books and many others.

These things can bring curses to our families and the Body of Christ. We therefore want to be completely free from them by

obeying the Lord's command just as King Hezekiah and Josiah did.

3. Commit your life to be a blessing

Are you born again? Then your potential is unbounded - go, climb up the ladder of God which was shown to Jacob. Live with the Lord and commit everything you do to His trust for He can enlarge your limited vision and dream. Never decide out of fear but because you know it's the right thing to do and that's what God's Word says. Always be wary that we are the "public" and that there's no such thing as private when you're a Christian. The Lord sees everything we do, and we cannot live double lives, worshipping Jesus one time and enjoying sin at other times. Impurity and unrighteousness is darkness that needs to be removed in our midst. To be a blessing there are essential values we need to take with us and this includes integrity!

4. Commit your life that you will serve the Lord wholly

If lies attack your mind like, "you will fall and backslide again, what's use being a Christian?" speak the word of God that says **"For He will bring His work in you to its completion through the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6)**. It must be clear to us that once we commit our lives to God, we must surrender everything to Him from our personal lives to even our families and properties. We become His slaves, His servants, His friends and children at the same time because we call Him Lord and Father. We let the Lord rule over us. Our properties, our possessions and our families for we know He

can be trusted and He is good! Didn't He say "is anyone good but God?" Peter replied when challenged by the Lord, "Are you also going away"? He said, **"No Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68).** When you feel down, pray and worship God; ask others to pray for you. Never withdraw alone and never withhold anything from the Lord. Judas withheld his heart from God, so Satan grabbed it! What you withhold or hide from the light of God will ultimately be used by the enemy!

5. Humble ourselves by being open to others

I find it always that when I have a relationship where conflict has occurred, I don't totally close and shut the person down even when I think I'm right. I always try to have an open door and even when it feels hurting, I pray for that person. God heals me faster and later we were friends again. This is part of our new nature when we become born again; if we don't we end up hurting each other and this can weigh us down. I find it true also with children that they are more open compared to adults. One time I hurt a small child's feeling because I withheld a thing that is wary for her. At first, she felt really bad but later we were playing again. With adults, it takes more time from days to even years. The Lord Jesus said, **"I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from *the* wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight"** (Luke 10:21). This means that if we want to grow more, to learn more and to be used

mightily, we should learn to be like the little children. A child is always open to correction and learning because she knows she does not know anything. When we live like a little child, we will always be living in the glorious realm of miracles and triumphs. In sum, if we become as open as a little child, we will receive more of Him. This can be in the form of anointing, blessings, deliverance, guidance and even financial wisdom. He only gives when we have open hearts like small children have. King Josiah was mightily used by God to subdue false religion in his kingdom because “when he was a child, he sought God.” He loves Him truly!

“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.” (Pro 16:18)

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.” (1Pe 5:5-7)

“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." (Jas 4:6)

6. Become a true worshipper

How did the Samaritan woman become a true worshipper? She left all! She left her old life and her old ways when she met the River of life. She did not worship with CDs, tapes, hymnals and choirs yet she was counted as a true worshipper. She believed the Lord wholly convinced that she saw and met the very Messiah they have been looking for. Jesus, being a Jew shouldn't be speaking to a Samaritan much more to a woman. Jews discriminate the Samaritans. They are like second class citizens of Israel and Judah but God doesn't and He opens his arms to those who love righteousness and ready to follow Him. The Bible says, And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, **"He told me all the things that I *have* done."** So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word (Joh 4:39-41). The Lord showed His healing love to these people who were despised by the Jews. And even without doing miracles there many believed Him! Wouldn't that convince you? To be a true worshipper means we worship the Father through Jesus. We become what we worship, and the Samaritan woman ended up sharing Jesus' love to the whole city because she was touched by the Eternal One in her heart. She knew what it means to be accepted in the Beloved (Eph 2:4) rather than rejected and discriminated.

7. Jesus says “He loves you”

More than anything else, we must be grounded in the knowledge that Jesus loves everyone and Jesus loves each one of us personally. Only true love can heal us completely of the religious spirit. Love is the ultimate weapon against pride. Love finds as its expression to be humble and forgiving. That’s why Jesus is the very expression of the Father’s love given to us. He was opposed so much by the Pharisees because He walked in love that runs contrary to their nature of deceit and hypocrisy. Remember, a religious spirit seeks to dominate, to persecute and ultimately to destroy. This is darkness and only the light of God can cast it out when we shine His love to a person in bondage. Love therefore finds its ultimate expression to worship God because it does not seek to please its own. Love is never selfish.

I love my wife very much and even when at times we have disagreements and she curls herself avoiding me, I always try to embrace her and ask forgiveness. This is regardless whether I’m right or wrong. When I try to curl up also, I find it contrary to what’s in my heart and my heart aches. I then understood what the Lord said about David that when he tried even to cut the corner of Saul’s clothing, **“his heart smote him” (I Samuel 24:4)**. God gave us a new nature to be able to do that. He gave Love for us. He gave Jesus. May it be our greatest desire to be impacted with God’s love to love Him more, His people and those around us. Love triumphs over pride and it is love that casts out the religious spirit.

Chapter 12

Sharing His love, a quest to make

We then see that we are what we are only because of God and we can't change ourselves. We can't help a bit to change other's attitude. Therefore the best thing we can do is to seek the Lord in things we want to be changed in us. This can range from attitudes to personal weaknesses. Even the Apostle Paul sought God to remove his weaknesses: **“And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Co 12:7-10).** Let us then seek the Lord on this matter, that like Paul our weaknesses will become our strengths. What we can do then is to minister love to others just as Jesus touched us. The proverb, “you can't give what you don't have” is true. We can only impart love when we have it.

I have read some books of Christian writers that can really impart courage and anointing. In the same way some books feel repulsive and breed doubt so that it is better to never read or even touch them. Love is transferable and the more we love, the more contagious it becomes. Love then can be transferred. If even those books and tapes and CDs could carry love, how much more a person who speaks? When Andrew was touched by the love of Jesus, he can't help but bring his brother Peter to meet the Master! When Jesus touched the heart of the Samaritan woman, she brought a whole city before Him!

As the love chapter of the Bible says, even if we have faith, gifts and power and even die for a person – if love is not there – it's nothing. Don't you know that the Master only knows those who love Him? **But if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (I Cor. 8:3)** What does this tell us? The Lord Jesus is in heaven right now, and in heaven it doesn't matter how much power we walk or how much faith we have. What touches God most are men and women who walk in love! People who walk in love have the power to overcome even the greatest hatred, strife, conflict and troubles satan can inflict upon them! **“But the greatest of this is love”**, Paul would repeat to our ears.

How can we then walk in true love? Do we feel it? Just as the Lord has walked in love while on earth, love must be our primary motive in ministering to others. Without love, non-Christians could easily discern that we are phony! Love can be

felt, as even the Lord have emotions. But that's not all. We must be committed to showing it by asking God's love to love Him more and to love each other and the hostile world around us (see John 17). When we do that, even the person who can be the most evil will repent and accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Certainly, there are many reasons to justify we should not love. And when you buy that lie, you end up in the lap of satan. Love is sincere and love must therefore be true.

Jesus enjoyed even the company of the greatest sinners and He is known as the friend of sinners simply because He did not criticize them or denounced them. He loved them as His own without even letting them know. He did not say to them – “You, get out, filthy people of the streets”, but rather “I come that you may have life and have it abundantly”. He asked Peter, “Do you love Me? Yes Lord”, he said and we have now the church rolling because of Jesus touching Peter's heart. He touched and transformed the deepest hatred in the recesses of Saul's heart, and we have with us Epistles that guided the church throughout the centuries of its existence.

If we have been transformed so much by His love, it doesn't matter if others will hurt us or if others will criticize us because all that matters now is the opinion of God to us. It is love that compels us to do everything in a righteous manner. All the ridicule and the curses of other people come to nothing when we abide in love. What matters most is that we learn to love and walk in love so we can touch the lives of

more people and bring them to Jesus just as the Samaritan woman had done. Will you?

God's church is surely being built up. Jesus is the foundation of the Church and His love is the cement that binds us all. When He looks down from heaven, He does not see many churches but rather His Church as one. We will be unified with love because love does not divide or bring strife. Love serves; it is not selfish. The primary way to defeat any bondage in life is to love the Lord so much that our attention has been fastened to the Lord and we won't even dare to look at our problems but to Him. When we love, we will not steal, kill or rob and surely, we will not speak against our elder without two or three eyewitness accounts of charges brought against him. Neither shall we despise our government no matter how it might look because we are to love where God placed us and pray peace rather than be part of destruction or division.

I tell you no matter how difficult a thing looks, with God's love we are free to roll and move mountains! See, I can easily do my wife a favor when she says "honey, can you carry these things for me, or shall we go and shop together"? All because I love her and I would only endeavor to do pleasing things for her. Let's pray.

Father,

Oh, Lord my God, grant me to love you more, to love your Word and to love my neighbor as you would love them. And enable me to love those whom I hate and to overcome evil with good. Help me not to repay evil for evil but overcome evil with your love. Reveal my deceptions, show me where I am being afflicted by this religious spirit and lead me to your everlasting path. Make me a vessel of your love to touch others and bring healing to their lives. Thank you, in Jesus name, I pray, Amen!

About the author

I hail from my beloved town of Tabuk, nestled in the mountains of Kalinga which is the rice granary of Northern Luzon in the Philippines. In Tabuk, I learned my abc and rudiments of drawings from my mother who taught me during my primary years. I have always been a regular church attendee at our local Protestant Church which was near our place so that as a small boy I knew more of Bible stories than legends taught in our schools. I finished my elementary and high school as a Salutatorian and went to study BS Biology at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) through the help of NISGP Scholarship. There I met the Lord Jesus Christ and attended discipleship with the Destiny and Lakas-Angkan ministries. After graduation, I held jobs as instructor and research assistant at several government offices. I recently received my degree of Master of Science in International Studies in Aquatic Tropical Ecology (ISATEC) from the University of Bremen with the help of the German Academic Exchange Scholarship (DAAD). I am happily married to the love of my life, Erna and together with our adorable daughter, Germane Amber, we currently reside in Bonn, Germany.

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