



# IRON SHARPENS IRON

***BAD HERMENEUTICS LEADS  
TO TWISTING OF VERSES***

**BY**

***CYPRIAN ANTWI ANUAH***

# **IRON** **SHARPENS** **IRON**

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## **Iron sharpens Iron**

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## **Dedication**

*This book is affectionately dedicated to Scott Grande, a truthful and faithful servant of Christ; whose faithful service I admire so much. Scott, thank you for your prayers and support.*



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# Forward

This timely piece of work has been written to help both those who have been deceived and the deceivers, at a time when falsehood and false doctrines have enslaved many who due to the storms of difficulties and life's challenges have ignorantly given themselves to teachers who distort the texts of Scriptures in order to exploit their audience. Pastor Cyprian Antwi Awuah raises some Scripture texts that are taken out of context and used to mislead and exploit many church-goers who lack the understanding of some basic interpretation skills for understanding Scriptures. The author offers some fundamental hermeneutical and exegetical principles necessary for understanding and rightly interpreting the Scripture texts which he presents. Most important among other principles is the rule of context.

Also important is the need to know the grammatical rules and communication principles that were used by biblical authors to communicate God's Word. Pastor Cyprian draws his audience's attention to these communication rules as he presents some of the Bible texts often quoted, misinterpreted and misapplied to the detriment of the spiritual growth of many who lack the proper understanding of the interpretation of Scriptures.

This book is a must read for those who really care and truly want to grow spiritually and wish to be delivered from the wrong interpretation of the Scriptures by false teachers of today. I hope this book will be an eye-opener and inspiration to those who read it- Indeed, Iron sharpens Iron! Shalom.

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# **Introduction**

*Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens  
another. Proverbs 27:17*

It is important we recognize that it is not taking one's case to court that makes him a winner of the case, no; it is for the court to decide whether he is guilty or innocent according to the facts of evidence. Therefore, it is not about what we have believed or taught for years that make us right, but it is about what the Bible says and means that is right. Many Christians believe in certain things because they think God has taught those things in the Bible. Others teach fellow Christians to believe and act in certain way(s) because they also think that is what the Bible teaches. Whose view is right? Can everybody be right but with different views? In that case would that not make the Bible a book that has many interpretations? If God makes a single statement to a twenty member group, does He expect each member in the group to understand Him? Obviously, His intention would be to have them understand the very thing He is communicating. The understanding can only happen when words expressed by the communicator are taken literally, unless context suggests otherwise. The Bible is subject to a single interpretation (the original intent of the speaker/author), but not different interpretations.

Whatever Bible authors communicated in their time must mean the same thing today as it meant then. While we can have different or many applications, the author's intent must remain the same as he meant it.

If you wrote a letter to your grandmother on the July/1/2019, what your letter meant then must mean the same thing when the same letter is being interpreted to your great grand children two hundred years later, even if your great grand children will be speaking a different language then. Nobody can understand the Bible until they understand and agree with this basic fact. If anyone can interpret any communication material, be it article, letter, Bible, Quran, or any other book, there must be certain principles or rules

to follow before he/she can understand the intention of the author. These principles will be discussed shortly. But before that we should also understand why some distort the Bible. They do that because they do not interpret the Bible literally. Anybody who fails to follow the correct way of interpretation, which is literal interpretation does that because the person is either following ***Allegorical interpretation, or Spiritualizing a text interpretation.***

Allegorical interpretation is where the reader seeks for higher sense of meaning instead of taking literally what the author has said. Typical examples are:

Adam and Eve ate a literal fruit in the garden. Allegorical interpretation objects this literalness. Instead, allegorical interpretation says that the fruit was about sex, not literal, normal fruit. So in effect what they mean is that, when God warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, He was warning them not to have sex. Even though men who follow allegorical interpretation do not have any biblical proof for their claims, they do not have regrets for following this evil way of interpretation. They see such knowledge as a higher knowledge that they have discovered.

While the Bible records that David picked five stones when he faced Goliath, allegorical interpretation does not see literal five stones. Instead, it sees the stones as Jesus. In other words, Jesus was the five stones. There are many other allegorical interpretations of this same issue. Many more Bible passages have been distorted by men who follow this line of interpretation. This book seeks to draw Christian's attention to the distortions that have happened to the Bible because of allegorical interpretation.

Many of the Old Testament passages are *spiritualized* to have a second reference other than the original audience which the author had in mind. For example, certain Old Testament prophecies, both those fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled ones that concern nation Israel have been claimed and taught by most preachers today as if those passages are referring to the Body of Christ, the Church. This problem arises when the Bible reader does not understand the difference between Israel and the Body of Christ.

## **The Bible is a communication book**

The Bible is the Word of God. This statement is true because God inspired holy men to write the things they wrote. But the Bible is also a communication book because it is a recording of communications, conversations, arguments, and direct words from God, men, groups, leaders, and nations. The authors sometimes recorded statements or conversations between God and men, like Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Jesus Christ, His Apostles, etc. It contains conversations or words between two or more people. Example, we have the record of the words between Eve and the Serpent; Moses and Pharaoh; Saul and David; Abraham and God, etc. Therefore, rules and principles that govern language or communication must be applied to the Bible before one can arrive at its meaning.

The Bible being a “spiritual book” does not rule out the fact that it is still a book. It is a book because it contains communications, and since communication is guided by principles or rules, the Bible must equally be subjected to those principles for its meaning to be derived. This is the only way pastors, Christians, or Bible interpreters can correctly get to know the intentions of the Bible authors. Language and principles that govern communication are not separated from one another. The same principles that govern a speaker/writer are the same principles that should govern the listener/audience in order for them to understand the speaker. Apart from those principles governing both the speaker and his audience, communication cannot exist.

Principles of communication were not made by men; they are principles that belong to language, without which no communication can exist. In other words, principles of communication are inherent in language. God is the source of both language and its principles; men only learned, discovered, and systematized those principles. But we should understand that discovery of knowledge or principles by men do not make men the source of knowledge.

The principles are: Grammatical rules, Context, literalness of words, and consideration of any historical gap if context demands it. These principles bind both the communicator and hearers before they can understand each other. Grammatical rule guides the parties to know what tenses are being used, whether a statement is in the present, past, or future tense. Grammar guides everyone to identify who or what the subject or object is, or what the mood and voice of a verb is.

Context is another principle or rule that governs communication or interpretation. Context is about considering what was being said before and after the verse or statement under consideration. Literalness of speech must guide every interpretation or communication before one can determine what a text says. If a text is figurative, the same context of the text will dictate to the interpreter that it is figuration so that he/she looks for the literal meaning behind the figuration since for every figurative language, there is a literal meaning behind it. Bible interpreter must also recognize that there is a historical gap between the time that the Bible was written and today. The history of Bible times and our present history are not the same. Therefore, since the Bible is an ancient book, when an interpreter is faced with a text that calls for reliance on biblical history, the interpreter must do so in order to determine what the original author of that text meant.

These principles are not something that the Holy Spirit infuses into the believer, no; rather, they are discovered and learned when a person realizes the fact that the Bible is not only “spiritual” but it is also a book which contains communications of different persons.

In this book, the author is going to demonstrate how important it is for every believer to be aware of these general principles. Knowing hermeneutics does not only save a leader or member from believing a misinterpretation of a text, it also saves the preacher from distorting the Bible. The author seeks to create the necessary awareness among pastors, Bible students, and other Christians by using the normal passages in the scriptures that have been distorted by many Christians simply because the normal rules or principles governing every communication were/are ignored

when interpreting those biblical passages. As humans, we sometimes think we are right in our opinions on certain matters until when later we notice that our opinions were wrong. This normally happens after we have had all the facts gathered concerning the matter. The author agrees with King Solomon when he made this profound statement, “ *The first to plead his ease seems rights until another comes and examine*”. Proverbs. 18:17.

In this book, God- through His word is going to be the one to examine our opinions concerning the passages that we are about to consider. By following the grammatical, contextual, literal, and historical rules of interpretation, we are going to see that the Bible never teaches any of those things that many have believed for years. It is my prayer that the reader of this book allows him/herself to be corrected through the strict examination of God's word so that the divine iron (divine view) can sharpen his/her human iron (human view) so that in the end, Jesus Christ can be glorified and we may be edified.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The Danger Of Ignoring Grammatical Rules**

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. Matthew 11:12*

It is said that a person cannot teach what he/she does not know. I think that statement is very true, for one cannot apply the rules of interpretation if he does not know them. There are different ways that this verse has been misinterpreted by many Christians. I remember two of those interpretations as follows:

- 1) Christians are to pray and take their possessions by force. What they mean by possessions is that, God has blessed every Christian with material blessings and therefore through prayer the believer can claim those material things.
- 2) Another explanation some give to this verse is that, heaven can only be entered by the strife of the believer. In other words, one has to work his way out by striving before he/she can enter into the kingdom of God or heaven.

I must admit that I used to believe in those explanations too. And I know there are many more Christians and pastors who still believe and rely on those explanations. The question is that, are these explanations or interpretations given to Matthew 11:12 right or wrong? If they are wrong, then how do we know they are wrong? You see, no one can say something is right or wrong unless there is standard procedure for measuring that very thing. There is right way for doing everything in life. There is also a right way for interpreting the Bible or any written communication. Once any person fails to use the standard or correct procedure for interpreting the Bible, he/she has no chance of getting the correct interpretation.



The reason is that, you cannot get the right result by avoiding the right means. In the plan of God, the right thing must be done in the right way; the same is true when it comes to interpreting the Bible; it must be done in the right way; and the right way is by following the right hermeneutics.

Milton S. Terry (1883 as cited in Roy B. Zuck, 1991, P.19) explains that hermeneutics is both a science and an art. As a science, it enunciates principles, investigates the laws of thought and language, and classifies its facts and results. As an art, it teaches what application these principles should have, and establishes their soundness by showing their practical value in the elucidation of the more difficult Scriptures. The hermeneutical art thus cultivates and establishes a valid exegetical procedure.

We have already talked about the rules as: grammatical, literal, contextual, and historical. Example, just as laboratory testing follow rules or procedures at the hospital in order to make a conclusion of a specific medical case, so also biblical interpretation follow rules or certain principles in order to arrive at what the Bible is saying. This means that to get the meaning of a particular Bible text is not a matter of God the Holy Spirit dropping the meaning into your head. His job is to guide us through these principles so that we see the facts ourselves. We cannot hide behind the idea that “the Bible is spiritual” as if being “spiritual” means one needs not to follow rules. We do not have to make the mistake into thinking that we can just open the Bible, flip its pages to the desired verse or chapter, pray and then all of a sudden the Holy Spirit will start putting the meaning of the text into our heads. The NIV translation brings out the meaning well:

*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. Matthew 11:12 (NIV)*

Those popular interpretations of Matthew 11:12 came about simply because those who invented those explanations and passed them on to the rest of the world, especially, among African Communities did

that because they failed to follow the rules. And churches that follow the same explanation today do that because they also do not follow the rules that were ignored by their predecessors. Now let us follow the rules and see what we will get from the passage.

**Context:** The context of Matthew 11:12 can be picked right from Chapter 11:1. The context says that John the Baptist was in prison. And later revelations from some portions of the gospels reveal that John the Baptist never came out again; he was beheaded. Nothing is said about prayer in the context of Matthew 11, from verses 1 to 12.

**Literalness of words:** John the Baptist was a human being who was indeed in prison and suffering. The one who was talking was also “literal” Jesus Christ who later died for our sins. Nothing in verse 12 is a figure of speech. John was suffering physical suffering; his body was hurting; he was emotionally in pain; he wished he could get out of prison; that was why he sent his disciples to go and ask Jesus If He was the expected one. And John indeed was later going to be murdered or taken by force against his own free will.

**Grammar:** Present, passive, indicative. The tense of verse 12 is in present tense. The present tense emphasizes an ongoing action or an action that is taking place now. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is going through suffering. In our context, we already know that John was suffering in prison.

### Voice

Matthew 11:12 says, “...the kingdom of heaven suffers violence....” Which voice does the verb, “**suffers**” in the sentence express itself? Is it in active or passive voice? Basic grammar rule suggests that a verb is passive when the subject receives the action of the verb. We know from the verse that two groups are being discussed: Those in the kingdom of heaven being one group, and violent men being another group. It is said that the subject of the verb, that is, “the kingdom of heaven”, or to be specific, those who are part of it, are receiving suffering or going through suffering. It is said in the same verse that there are violent men who are taking by

force or are inflicting suffering upon those in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, violent people were continually attacking those in the kingdom. Grammatically, there is absolutely nothing in the verse that suggests that those in the Kingdom, that is, the disciple, and by extension, us today, are to take something by force.

### **Mood**

Grammatical mood allows a speaker or writer to express his attitude toward what he is saying. What he is saying could be a command (imperative mood), expression of fact (indicative mood), conditional (subjunctive mood), desire or wish (optative mood) etc. Here, the believer or Bible student should ask the question, when Jesus said “*from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force*”, what was His attitude? Was Jesus giving a command, expressing a wish, or declaring a fact? By following all the hermeneutical tools, it is obvious that Jesus was only declaring a fact. Christ was rather informing His disciples about what was happening, but not commanding them. Nothing indicates in the text that He was commanding or asking His disciples to do anything, including prayer. There are many commands in the Bible that instruct Christians to pray, but it will be wrong and unprofessional on the part of any communicator of the Bible to look at a verse like this and read “a command to pray” into it while the original speaker did not have any command in his mind.

**History:** History is not necessarily required here in the context of Matthew 11 to determine the meaning of verse 12. History, though part of the hermeneutical tool in determining the meaning of a verse or passage as intended by the author, it is not a requirement in this verse to determine the meaning of the verse. This is because the other three hermeneutical tools can be relied upon to arrive at the meaning of the verse under consideration. Herod the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea had arrested John the Baptist for a rebuke that he received from John for taking Herodias, his brother's wife (Luke 3:19-20).

Why then do some misinterpret such a verse as if God is commanding Christians to take certain things by force? The simple answer is this: they do not know these communication rules, and therefore do not apply them. This mistake has robbed off many Christians from knowing the exact thing(s) that God has said in many places of the Bible.

### **The problem with such distortion from Matthew 11:12**

Interpretation is the key to whatever a person believes or becomes convicted of. In other words, all our doings (applications) flow from our faith/conviction, and our faith or conviction also flows from how we hear something interpreted. Nobody believes in anything until they hear something. Therefore, the way a message is presented is very important since it is from that the hearer or audience deduces and has his/her faith in whatever is said of God's word. For example, many shout, scream, and clap for hours in trying to take something by force which they believe have already been given to them by God. But we have to understand that those who practice that did not just invent such practice; it happened to them because they believed in the explanation which was given to them by someone. Many Christians believe and practice weird things simply because certain verses were picked out of contexts, that is, without any consideration of the normal communication rules.

### **Learning a principle from Matthew 11:12**

What are we to make of Matthew 11:12 as Christians? If, as secondary audience there is no command directed to us to do anything, then what can we learn from the verse? Since all scripture is profitable, we need to learn how each scripture can profit us so that instead of a scripture which is meant for our profit or edification, it does not end up destroying us because of the error of misinterpretation. So we need to look for the general truth which cuts across all believers.

The basic truth or principle that is clear and can be generally accepted in Jesus' statement about the kingdom is that, the kingdom suffers violence. This statement is in present tense. This

suggests a continuous action. In other words, the kingdom of God keeps suffering violence. This statement has always been true since the announcement of the kingdom by John the Baptist. God's kingdom has always been under attack; John the Baptist was attacked, Jesus was attacked, and His disciples were continuously attacked. Today, the church continues to receive attack. There is something general that we see running across every person or individual who has been associated with God's kingdom, and the general thing is that, every person who is associated with God's kingdom faces varying degree of attack. The attack is not only spiritual, sometimes it manifests physically. Satan uses all kinds of means to attack God's kingdom.

### **Application of the principle**

Even though there is no command for us to do anything in the Matthew 11:12 verse, we have a principle to learn. The principle is that, if those in the kingdom were attacked as far as the kingdom history is concerned, then those of us in the kingdom (Christians today) should be aware that we can equally be attacked just as our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ and our predecessors were attacked. So the principle in Matthew 11:12 in context demands that we should know there is possibility of Christians coming under any attack because of our association with Christ, rather than thinking that we have been asked to pray and take something by force, or work forcefully in order to make it to heaven.

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Danger Of Not Considering Context**

*“For as he thinks within himself, so he is.....”*  
*Proverbs 23:7.*

The above verse is one of the verses in scripture that have been distorted to mean what the author did not have in mind. In fact, in many sermons and books, especially from most motivational preachers, this verse has been cunningly changed. The verse has become a proof text for many motivational speakers to back their teachings on *“becoming what you think”*. The change in the text that as led to this distortion is so minor that if one is not conscious of observing biblical words when studying the Bible, he would not notice the exact word that is changed.

You will notice that the correct text starts with the phrase, “For as **he** thinks within himself”. The third person singular pronoun, “he” in the statement has been replaced with the word, “man”. Therefore it is often quoted as this, “For as a **man** thinks within himself, so he is”. The question is: who made this change? Does this change affect the meaning of the verse and the intent of the author? The answer is yes. Words are very important in communication, and God intentionally made it so.

The Holy Spirit who is the divine author of the entire Bible was very wise in superintending the biblical human authors to choose the right words to communicate the idea He (Holy Spirit) intended. The problem that this change, from “he” to “man” has created is so serious that it can lead a Christian to believe in something that God has not said. Like I indicated in chapter 1, interpretation generates a particular conviction/ faith in the believer. The faith/conviction leads the individual to behave or act in a certain way. Therefore, when there is wrong interpretation, it creates wrong faith/conviction, and the result is that, it brings wrong application.

The pronoun, “he” emphasizes specificity while the word, “man” emphasizes a general, collective or inclusive term. So you can see the danger that can erupt when something “specific” is substituted with something “general”. No wonder many Christians have been carried away to think in the opposite direction of how God wants them to think and live their lives.

The pronoun “he”, regardless of how it is used, can only be referring to one specific person whose issue has already been talked about or discussed in a certain context. If I used the phrase, “he came here”, immediately you would ask me, who came here? But I could use that only when I had already discussed with you about a specific person, and therefore I assumed that you knew the person to whom I was referring. But when I say something like, “man is wicked”, I am using a generic or general term for all human beings. In other words, I am saying every human being has some wickedness in them.

### **The distortion on Proverbs 23:7**

It is said of this verse that as a man thinks within himself, so he becomes in life. It is often interpreted that the “thinks” in the verse is referring to ambition, vision, or dream of a person. So the whole verse is now suggested to mean that if you have a great vision or dream of becoming somebody prominent or great in life, it will surely happen. In other words, once you think about it and believe it, your thinking will be translated into a reality. So many motivational speakers who believe that this verse is promoting or encouraging Christians to have great thoughts, or vision for their lives often charge their audience to dream big, have greater visions and believe in them, for it will surely happen- for as a man thinks, so he is (becomes) in life.

It is not true that if a person thinks of himself as rich, then he will be rich. Many poor people who never thought of becoming rich in their lives became rich one day. There are countless unbelievers and Christians who thought of becoming rich but they never became rich throughout their lives despite every effort and opportunity they took advantage of. The apostles suffered

persecutions not because they thought of it; Timothy suffered from stomach pain not because he was always thinking about stomach pain.

In the Book of Job, he suffered and lost all that he possessed except his wife not because he thought of poverty, boils, etc. Nor did he suffer because he did not pay tithe as some tithe preachers make their followers believe. Job suffered because God was testing him. This is made clear in Job Chapter 1. One must interpret the Bible not by picking a verse out of context, but by interpreting it in light of the rest of the whole chapter, book, or the entire Bible. Satan is behind this kind of human teachings and he seeks to distract many preachers with it in order for them to focus on humanism and materialism rather than the spiritual life truth. Let us consider the questions below:

1. What did Solomon have in mind when he made that statement in Proverbs 23:7?
2. Is there a difference between motivational speeches and Christian doctrines?

We can get answers for these questions by reasoning from the scriptures and also by facing the realities or facts of life in general. In an attempt to answer the first question (1), let us look at the context of Proverbs 23:7. What was said before and after verse 7? Beginning from vs 1-3, Solomon is giving an advice to a young man to control his appetite when he is served with a king's delicacies. The idea or principle expressed here is not only teaching how one should respond or react when being served with a special food of a king, but it also suggests that one is to be careful when offered something that is not from a pure heart.

Verse 4 and 5 contain another advice to the young man to cease from chasing wealth as a goal in life. Verse 6 through 8 has an advice concerning dealing with a selfish person, especially, when a selfish person serves you a food or ask you to eat and drink to your satisfaction. This advice is important since a greedy or selfish



person will not freely give out his food or any item unless there is hidden motive. Since you cannot read peoples motives, the information you have about them as being selfish should be enough to warn you. Since prevention is better than cure, it is advisable that you avoid it than to take it and regret later for even telling him about your secrets. So it is in the middle of this advice that Solomon wrote in verse 7 that, *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, But his heart is not with you. Proverbs 23:7(NKJV)*

So how could somebody change “he” or “his” in this verse to become “a man?” Again, how could somebody suggest this verse to mean that a person should have great dream or vision and mix it with faith so that it becomes a reality? Clearly, this is total Bible distortion communicated from ignorance. People who distort this verse into a kind of a “vision” and “dream” verse do so not because it is deliberate, no, I do not think so; but it is because they do not know the rules or the hermeneutical principles that govern the interpretation of any communication. I doubt if they knew, they would intentionally distort such a great advice into something God did not intend.

Who does the “he” refer to? Of course, no one can know the person to whom the “he” in the verse is referring to until the reader considers context, by going back to the preceding verse. There, in verse 6, it is clear that the pronoun “he” is referring to a specific person who has been described by the text as “selfish man”. So “he” does not refer to every man, neither does the verse refer to a believer who wants to have a big dream or vision.

### **Difference between motivational speeches and Christian doctrines**

We have been warned in explicit terms against loving the world and everything in it (1 John 2:15). To love the world includes prioritizing materialism and humanism over the pursuit of the spiritual life. A Christian may deny that he/she is world loving person, but the time, energy, and the resources spent on materialism and emphasis on humanism will betray him if indeed he loves the world.

Motivational speeches have the record of emphasizing on the things that can bring ease to people or bring out some qualities that people may have in themselves. While these things may not be sin in themselves, they are not the purpose for which God gave us the gift of salvation. God saves the fallen man from spiritual death in order to bring Christlike attitude in them. The work assigned to the Holy Spirit to accomplish in Christians is not about bringing out their natural potentials (that is reserved for other factors in his/her environment to help achieve that), rather, to gradually build the character of Christ in them. One cannot love self and God at the same time, yet most motivational speeches seem to emphasize on nothing but self.

When Apostle Paul said nothing good was in him (Romans 7:18), he did not mean that he did not have any natural potential. We know that he could make tent for a living (of course that came from his natural potentials), and also he had a great intellect. But ability to make a tent or having a great intellect does not give a person a divine ability to do good works or overcome evil. Natural potentials from birth have nothing to do or add to our spiritual life. While our natural potentials may give us so many advantages, such advantages have no spiritual significance. Even though one can glorify God through the use of their natural potentials, the potentials themselves are not the product or work of God the Holy Spirit. In fact, one does not need to trust Jesus Christ or receive the Holy Spirit before he/she can manifest their natural potentials.

A person does not need Jesus or the Holy Spirit in order to become a great footballer, athlete, boxer, singer, scientist, mathematician, politician, motivational speaker, etc. Both Christians and non-Christians can become professionals in these areas without Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It is expedient that Christians clearly understand the exact work of the Holy Spirit in them so that they do not confuse the Spirit's work with fulfillment of one's natural potentials or ambition.

While modern motivational speakers emphasize on human achievements, the Christian doctrines are geared towards bringing the Christians to the true knowledge of Christ so that Christ's accomplishments can also manifest in them. Christian doctrines seek to bring a life of contentment and Christ-like virtues among Christians, thereby removing the unnecessary comparison and competition among themselves. But modern motivational speeches are geared towards stimulating the Christian into thinking that he/she can do or achieve anything in life if only the person will believe God. The idea of “believe in God” Is not a magical power to get whatever we want in life. This is exactly what lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, and boastful pride of life is about. The difference is that, Christian doctrines are designed to save Christians daily from these lusts, but the modern motivational speeches stimulate Christians to embrace these lusts.

Often times those teachings are presented in a very subtle way, which makes it difficult for the ignorant Christian to realize that he/she is being encouraged to love the world. The Bible is clear on the fact that pastors who reject the Christian faith or doctrines can be deceived, and they in turn will deceive others or their congregation (2 Timothy 3:13). The sad thing is that, many ministers who project motivational teachings, which stimulate natural potentials over the Christian doctrines\faith, may not even be aware that they themselves have been deceived into promoting humanism and materialism.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Misapplication of Exodus 22:18**

*“You shall not allow a sorceress to live”*

*Exodus 22:18*

*“You shall not permit a sorceress to live”*

*Exodus 22:18 (NKJV)*

*“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”*

*Exodus 22:18 (KJV)*

Exodus 22:18 is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Scriptures. Knowledge is built upon knowledge; ignorance of knowledge “A” can affect the believer's understanding of Knowledge “B”. When a Christian or Bible student does not know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the interpretation of the Old Testament becomes a serious challenge to the person. It is true that all Scripture is profitable for our learning. However, it is important we understand that application varies. By application, I mean, what we are supposed to do as required by a particular text as in the case of Exodus 22:18.

The Jews were the audience of this command. The command was part of the many commands that God gave to them through Moses. God has shifted from the Jews to a new administration or dispensation where we do not have such command in the New Testament to end somebody's life. Since the law is still part of the Bible and Christians still study it in their local Churches, it is vital we learn how to interpret it in light of the New Testament. Failure to recognize this will always cause the interpreter or preacher to take the church to the Old Testament as if the church is Israel. This explains why every bit of Christian doctrine or faith must be known by the preacher. If a preacher does not know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, how can he know how to interpret the Old Testament? Such a person will always be in trouble when interpreting the Scriptures.

Israel as a nation was prohibited from engaging in sorcery or witchcraft. The violation of this law called for extermination of the guilty person. The modus operandi for taking the person's life, according to the law, was to stone the person to death.

### **How did the Israelites find out that someone was a witch or magician?**

First of all, they did not find out through prayer; neither did they find out because a prophet (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) said to them that someone was a witch, for no prophet ever found a witch “spiritually”, or through prayer. The Jews found out that some people were witches because those witches or magicians had physical places: shrines or alters where they practiced their witchcraft or magic. It was a physical place where people visited and consulted the witch or magician. Their understanding of witches is not the same way that we understand witches. Our understanding of witches today is based on what a supposed prophet tells us; a practice that is not found in the scriptures

Witchcraft or the practice of magical skills and abilities is a broad term that varies culturally and societally, and thus can be difficult to define with precision. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament condemn this practice. In fact, Galatians 5:20 mentions this practice as works of the flesh. A carnal believer in his frustration and disobedience to God can end up in visiting such a place for so many reasons. Christians are warned against such practices. King Saul, who ordered the witches or magicians in his time to be killed if they were found, later, in his apostasy, ended up visiting the same place that he had once condemned. This means that if we lose our fellowship with God as Christians, we become powerless to control ourselves from engaging in all kinds of evil practices.

God specifically ordered the Jews to destroy anyone who was practicing witchcraft. The reason is that He did not want the Jews to be deceived. Consulting any person apart from God to enquire of any secret in one's life is unscriptural. The practice takes people's attention from God and His word. Today, there are those who are

practicing the same thing in a different form, and they call it prophecy. This is a situation whereby a person rejects studying the Bible and claim that he is a prophet of God. Some claim to be seeing secret things about other Christian and that they can pray to change people's situation. For this reason, some Christians visit those men and women who call themselves prophets and prophetesses so that they can know what is going on their lives: thus, in their marriages, businesses, families, etc. But this is the exact practice that God condemns. Dr. Paul Cookey (Old Testament Hebrew Scholar), exegetically, does an excellent work on Exodus 22:18. His article can be accessed via: <https://www.academia.edu>

This is what Exodus 22:18 is all about. The question is, as Christians, what are we to do with witches and wizards? Does the New Testament recognize that witchcraft or sorcery exist? If yes, then what is the solution provided in the scriptures? The solution that God gave to nation Israel was to stone the person to death. Is that the same solution given to the church or Christians today? Are we also to stone people that we think are witches and wizards? The Bible is so clear on the answers to these questions. We shall look at them shortly. Here is New Testament recognition of the facts about the existence of evil forces, and that Christians are part of their target in their daily operations.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*  
*Ephesians 6:12*

If we accept this Scripture in Ephesians 6:12 as truth, then we must as well accept the provisions which are given as a solution to the operations or attacks of these forces as truth. We have to believe that the only solution given by God is the right solution. It will be a wrong thing to pick a solution meant to be applied by a certain group in the past, as in the case of nation Israel as a solution for another group; that would be like taking China's constitution and applying it to the people of United States. God is the God of order;

what is meant for nation

Israel must not be applied to the church simply because the two groups (Nation Israel and the Church) have their rule of life recorded in the same Bible.

Just as we can have two separate sections devoted for different groups in a nation's constitution, say a section for women's right and the right of children or the media, the same way the Bible also has sections for different groups and they must be recognized as such.

Question 1: How was Israel asked to deal with witches?

Answer: They were to stone the person physically till she died.

Question 2: How is the Church or Christian today supposed to deal with witches or evil forces?

Answer: They are to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11).

Please, notice that Israel was never asked to put on the whole armor of God. Instead, they were asked to stone the person who was into that practice. Again, they were not even to pray for the person, rather, they were to stone her. Never in the New Testament did Christians stone anyone whom they believed was into witchcraft, neither was the church instructed by the New Testament writings to engage into such practice. Jesus Christ received all kinds of attack and His apostles too, but never did they stone or even pray that God should kill their enemies. When they came under serious attack in the book of Acts, their humble prayer was that:

*Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word. Acts 4:29*

When you feel threatened as a Christian, what do you do? Do you call on God in prayer for Him to take control over the issue, or you call “thunder”, “fire”, and “Holy Ghost” to strike those that you think are behind the attack? Of course the New Testament does not teach Christians to pray in that manner. We are told to put on the

whole armor of God so that we may be able to withstand in the evil

days (Ephesians 6:13). We are also asked that in everything, we are to make our request known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6). The verse says, “in everything”. This means in every situation, we are to pray to God and tell Him to do what we want Him to do. But we should bear in mind that prayer is not designed to make God do what contradicts His word.

So if one asks God to kill somebody whom he thinks is a witch or wizard, the person should know that God is not going to do that. If that were possible, the apostles would have prayed and killed all their enemies. It is high time we stopped wasting our time with all those wrong prayers as if God is under our commands to do whatever we ask of Him. God only answers prayer so long as it falls within His plan for the believer. The divine solution for dealing with evil forces in this administration/dispensation of grace is all about putting on the armor, including prayer (Phil.4:6; Ephesians 6:18).

If any African Christian thinks that he/she has some very powerful evil forces in their maternal or paternal families (as most Christians are made to believe), they should know that Christians in the early church equally had family members, and that if we think we have evil forces in our families today, they also had evil forces in their time. The only one solution given by God to all Christians, whether the person lived in the early church, in the 1st century, or today in 21st century is the same solution recorded in Ephesians 6. We only put on the armor and stand while we look or wait on God to take the action on our behalf. Evil forces are far more intelligent than human beings, including Christians. Therefore, we must be obedient to what God has categorically stated in His word, not what we think is popular or is generally practiced from ignorance.

### **The strategy for the Christian warfare**

According to the Bible, the Christian life is characterized with warfare. The warfare is not between two Christians but between Satan, his evil spirits (fallen angels) and Christians. The warfare is not a physical thing where by Satan and his evil forces can be seen;



it is strictly a spiritual struggle. We have no strength on our own to

resist the devil. Our struggle with Satan must be understood in the sense that we are the object of his attack and not vice versa. We do not attack Satan directly; he and his evil forces are the ones who are constantly attacking Christians.

Our God given strategy for handling the devil's attack is defensive and not offensive. Christians are never asked to attack Satan or any of his forces. In fact, we do not even see them, let alone to attack them. But they do see us and have enough information about us. They know much about us more than we know about them. But the good news is that, our God knows more about our enemy, Satan. Having this set of knowledge helps us to be listening Christians rather than emotional Christians who act in a way that they have not been asked to act. A listening Christian is the one who pays attention to the teachings in the Bible, especially, the explanations from the Apostles in their letters. This will save him/her from engaging in any offensive attack on Satan.

When a soldier fails to comply by the instruction given by his commander, he/she is likely to be hit at war front. Having the right information and applying to a specific experience or situation as commanded by the Bible is the key to the spiritual warfare victory. It is not a matter of "decreeing" and "declaring", thinking that it shall be established as some believe. The misunderstanding of that verse in the book of Job has caused many Christians to think that God has given them power to say anything they wish and it will happen. This is a big fat lie.

*You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you; And light will shine on your ways. Job 22:28*

I have already said it in this book that knowledge is built upon knowledge. Therefore, when a person lacks a specific knowledge, it becomes difficult for the person to understand other related knowledge. For example, if one is not properly trained in Bible hermeneutics, he/she struggles to interpret certain texts in the scriptures. Every statement in the Bible was made by somebody. A

Bible statement was either made by God and it was recorded or the

statement was made by any of the Bible authors, Satan, or a different persons. Inspiration does not mean that any statement recorded in the Bible was made by God. This is the serious error which many have made for years. Inspiration of God's word only guarantees that the things that are recorded in the Bible actually happened. This means that the statements from the serpent to Eve, recorded in Genesis actually happened. This does not in any way suggest that those words came from God, no. Until a Bible student or any Christian learns the way of interpreting the Bible, they will never cease to be confused and also distort the word of God. Job 22:28 is perfectly in the Bible. But the questions are: who made that statement? Under what circumstances was the statement made? Was there any rebuke from God or any Bible author with regards to the statement? All these are hermeneutical keys to help one to understand the context of any passage.

The statement of Job 22:28 was not made by a Bible author or God. The statement was made by Eliphaz the Temanite, one of the friends of Job. Eliphaz and his other two colleagues, Bildad and Zophar made a lot of accusations against Job without any facts. They were just shocked at the sufferings that Job was going through. In trying to understand Job's situation without the knowledge of God, they ended up making all kinds of wrong conclusions. In their minds, a righteous person should not go through what Job suffered. But little did they know that it was God who had allowed that unpleasant situation to happen to Job. We are equally wrong in the same way when we try to make conclusions in people's life when they are going through some kind of sufferings.

According to Eliphaz, Job's suffering was as a result of some wickedness that Job must have committed (Job 22:5). So it was not God who asked Job to decree a thing and it shall be established (Job 22:28), it was Eliphaz who made that statement. Was Eliphaz and his friends right when they assumed that Job was suffering because of some sins he had committed or his children must have committed? (Job 4:7-8, 8:3-6, 11:13-15) If “no” is your answer, then why must you think that Eliphaz was right in his statement in

Job 22:28? In general, let us look at God's reaction towards the

three friends of Job. No single verse in Job must be interpreted without considering the entire book of Job. If anyone fails to consider God's response to the friends of Job with regards to the things that they said, he/she is likely to take their words as God's word since they are all recorded in the Bible. Here is God's general evaluation concerning the words or statements made by the three friends of Job:

*It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz, the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right as My servant Job has. Job 42:7*

This verse shows that God was not pleased with the things uttered by Job's three friends. It is therefore wrong to pick a verse from Eliphaz's statement (which God had condemned) and make it a universal application by asking Christians to decree and declare a thing in their prayers and it will happen. If Job had decreed (human decision), would that have changed what God had already permitted Satan to accomplish in Job's life? Of course nothing would have changed. Human decision cannot change God's sovereign decision. The testing of Job had been decreed by God, and no human decree or decision would have reversed God's decision. To pick Job 22:28 out of context and ask the congregation to "decree and declare a thing" is to disregard God's Judgment or evaluation on that statement.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Distortion Of A Single Word Can Lead To Wrong Expectation From God**

**Correct quotation:** *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all “these” things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33*

**Wrong quotation:** *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all “other” things will be added to you.*

I am always of the opinion that so many Christians have embraced certain false beliefs because of wrong interpretation that they were exposed to. A single change of a word in any sentence in the Bible can cause that sentence to lose the meaning it carries. And the sad thing is that not only does a change of a word changes the original meaning intended by the author, it also creates a wrong conviction or faith in the believer who is exposed to such distortion. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Many have put words in God's mouth. Matthew 6:33 is one of those verses that have suffered distortion when it comes to Bible interpretation. It is claimed of this verse that Jesus, when speaking to His disciples, was promising them every material thing in life that they would ever want, and that the condition to receive such material things was for them to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. An Influence from this distortion has caused many Christians to view Christianity with high expectation of material gains.

This error has also influenced many into a wrong way of praying to God. In their minds, since they have already sought for the kingdom, they see no reason that **all other things** are not being received from Jesus Christ. In their frustration, because of the unfulfilled promise, they assume that the supposed “**other things**” have to be grabbed or commanded by faith.

Just as knowledge is built upon knowledge, the same way false teaching is built upon false teaching. So for a false teaching to make sense to the naive, another false teaching must be added or built upon the other false teaching. So since in reality many Christians have not received the supposed **“all other things”** they hoped for, despite having sought His Kingdom and His righteousness, they are told to either take those things by force or by “decreeing” it in Jesus name. One distortion leads to the other until the possessor of such wrong belief is confronted with the truth based on the objective data from the scriptures, which are correctly interpreted in their proper contexts.

## Context

Context is king when it comes to Bible interpretation. This is because while other things may be considered besides context when determining meaning for a biblical text, context is always seen as the major key. In considering context to determine a true meaning of a biblical sentence, all the surrounding sentences or verses must be put into consideration. Therefore, in order to understand what Jesus meant by the demonstrative pronoun, “these”, which is oftentimes misquoted as “other”, one can only rely on context before he/she can know exactly what the **“these”** in the verse refers to.

Demonstrative pronoun, “this” (singular) or “these” (plural) is used to indicate something or some persons that is/are being referred or pointed to. The context takes us to the beginning of Matthew 6:25, where Christ began to encourage them not to worry about their lives, as to food, drink, and clothing. In verses 26-30, they were challenged to compare their lives with birds and flowers to see which one was much important. Of course since human beings are much important than birds and flowers, yet they are being taken care of, God would take care of His children.

The last part of verse 30 comes with a rebuke for their unbelief. Again, the same items: food, drink, and clothing in verse 31 are being repeated as things they should not worry about. Now, the verse under consideration states what our priorities should be in

life. When we set our priorities straight in life, by choosing God first or seeking first the interest of His work, He will never let us go hungry or naked.

So in the context, the “these” refers to the basic necessities of life. “These” emphasizes something specific rather than general. This verse is not a promise of earthly riches just because one believes in Jesus Christ and has sought for His Kingdom. The Bible neither promises earthly riches nor poverty. The things promised in Matthew 6:33 are all about food, drink, and clothing. (Matt. 6:25-31)

### **The problem with the use of the word, “other”**

The use of the word, “other” creates an entirely different meaning for the verse. Remember that interpretation produces faith, and faith/conviction produces application. The use of “other” suggests that Jesus has promised us every material things of this life. Such interpretation creates a high expectation in us, which in turn causes us to either question the faithfulness of God, or pray in ways that are not biblical. This is because God would have become a liar if the “other” interpretation in Matthew 6:33 was true.

Many Christians have faithfully sought His kingdom and His righteousness, yet their expectations of certain things they want in life have never been given. In fact, many faithful Christians have died without getting many things they wanted in life. Please, notice that the promise was that, He (Jesus), according to the “other” interpretation is to **add**, impliedly, all other things in this life to everyone who seeks His kingdom and His righteousness. So taking Jesus for His word (per the “**other**” interpretation), one could say that He is not faithful.

Truth that is promised to be experienced physically or outwardly cannot be said to be truth if after the condition is met, the promise cannot still be experienced. But since God is faithful, He fulfills whatever He promises. Anyone who has faithfully served the Lord can testify that God has never left him/her hungry, naked, or without water. Apostle Paul also understood this truth of God very

well. Concerning food and clothing, this is what he said:

*For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*  
1 Timothy 6:7-8

I know that if Apostle Paul was to be alive today, many prosperity preachers would not invite him to teach in their churches. This is because they would accuse him of being anti-prosperity, or consider him as someone who does not have faith, either to decree riches or to claim it by faith. They would be very much disappointed if they invited him, since the Apostle would not confirm their prosperity messages. Christianity does not preach riches, neither does it preach poverty; it simply teaches about the improvement of the believer's spiritual life or how Christ can be formed in him/her.

### **Why do Some Christians become rich or poor?**

It is important we understand the essence of Christianity. Christianity did not come so that the financially poor Christian can become rich, or that the already rich Christian becomes richer. This type of misrepresentation confuses the issue and creates problems among the naive. Truth must be told; this type of teachings did not come from Jesus Christ or His Apostles; it is a strange teaching to the Christian faith.

Not all people come to the Christian faith as financially poor persons. Some were already rich before they became Christians; others were materially poor before they became Christians. Some are born into rich families; others are born into poor families; some get opportunities to improve their finances whereas others are deprived of such opportunities; Some are hardworking and their hard work yield great result whereas others are lazy and would not like to work hard. Some work hard, yet they are still not rich.

Whether rich or poor, God's goal for their lives is about their salvation and spiritual lives. God has ordained Work as a means

through which man will feed himself and family. Whereas God is against those who fail to work, He is never against those who are not rich. This is because to be rich depends on a lot of factors. The factors include availability of certain resources; including money, opportunity, good economy, job, etc. Riches are results but not the means. What we should emphasize or pray for are: opportunities, Job, good economic environment, etc. When these things are available to men, including Christians, they can also become rich.

Therefore, the phrase, **“God wants every Christians to be rich”** is needless and unscriptural. People need opportunities and jobs, not phrases and terms. Christianity does not come with material resources; it comes with only Spiritual resources. Resources that facilitate material riches may be limited depending on where one is living. But the resources for the spiritual life are never limited regardless of where a believer lives. Apostle Peter says God has given us everything pertaining to life and Godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Both the materially rich and the poor have equal access and privilege in the spiritual life; the same cannot be said of material resources and opportunities in this life. On the very day that you got saved, God gave you every spiritual resources that you would ever need to grow spiritually. But God did not drop a million dollar into your account on the same day. This should tell us that salvation is concentrated on the spiritual life, but not on material riches.

Strangely, some come to the Christian faith as rich people but do not continue being rich financially for the rest of their lives. The cause may be numerous. It could be as a result of bad decision as far as investment is concerned; It could be as a result of some bad policies from government that affect businesses; it could be as a result of too much financial responsibility; it could be that God directly took those things from the person just to get his/her attention; it could also be as a result of bad health. For example, many lost all their monies in trying to improve their health.

So the point is that many Christians are poor or rich not because they claimed riches or poverty for themselves. You do not become rich by “decreeing” or “declaring” riches with your mouth, or by



exercising faith because you see “faith” as a force that can get you whatever you want in life. Such teaching is false because it is foreign to the teachings in the New Testament. Yes, Christians must have faith; but the question is faith in what? Every faith requires a working object; the object must be something God has said or promised, not something we have said, wished or decreed. Our faith should be in God's promises, statements, warnings, etc. Our faith should not be in our own faith. Believing in your own wishes is not the same as believing in something that the Bible teaches.

There is no scripture that teaches that if only we can have faith and decree and declare, whatever we have decreed and declared will happen. Of course there are numerous verses that are often taken out of context by those who advocate those messages to mean that Christians can have whatever they want in life by their faith.

If God wanted all His children to be rich, then every Christian would have become rich, but not just only those who emphasize on the prosperity gospel. There is absolutely nothing wrong with prosperity, but there is something wrong with emphasizing what the Bible does not emphasize. It creates the impression that Jesus Christ saved us from our sins so that we might become materially or financially rich. This is distractive and shifts the believer's mind from the pursuit of the spiritual goal to the possession of material things so that he could also boast about how God has blessed him or her. Again, one does not need Jesus Christ or salvation before he/she could become rich. Jobs, opportunities, resources, etc are the things or resources that people need in order to increase riches. Let us consider what Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy concerning riches:

*For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.<sup>8</sup> If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.<sup>9</sup> But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.<sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”.  
1 Timothy 6:7-10 [underlined words mine for emphasis]*

If Paul was alive today and he visited your church and taught this message, how would you take it? Would you say Paul was against prosperity? Does not 1 Timothy 6: 7-10 sound like a preacher who is against prosperity? Please, notice the underlined phrase, “those who want to get rich” is not the same as “those who want to work, get a job or opportunity”. The latter is what the Bible commands all Christians to do while the former is what they are warned against. It is good to be materially rich so long as you follow the right means. The right means is always the key, not just the riches itself, because “riches” is just a result but not a means.

Some Christians are rich because they work hard and their works are blessed and increased; others are rich by virtue of family inheritances. Others are also rich because they have access to those resources that facilitate riches. In contrast to what I have just stated, others are rich because they are or were once gold diggers; others are rich because they steal or stole from the state or from their employers. The problem with the prosperity message is that, it does not teach or provide the opportunities and resources that one needs in order to become rich; rather, it only tells Christians that “God wants them to be rich” as if God deposited certain amount of money in every Christians bank account when they got saved. Again, the constant repetition of the phrase, “God wants you to be rich” does not mean anything; it is needless. The phrase puts unnecessary pressure on hard working Christians who are still not rich.

Someone may say, if God has not saved us purposely to make us rich, then why did Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9 say that “*Jesus became poor in order that we might become rich.*” That is a good question and it is addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Did Jesus Die Purposely To Make Christians Materially Rich?**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 (underlined words mine for emphasis)*

If we have agreed that context is “king” in interpreting any literature, including the Bible, then we must as well consider the context of this verse, without which we have no way of understanding the verse. On the surface of the verse, it is most likely many will assume that Paul is talking about financial riches. It is therefore normal for anyone to stand on this verse alone to conclude that the text is about becoming financially or materially rich.

I have underlined the second person plural pronouns, “**your**” and “**You**” for a reason. In Bible interpretation, each word is very important, including pronouns. Since both Apostle Paul and the Corinthian believers were saved, it is important we ask the question: If the verse meant financial riches, then why did Paul not use the pronoun, “**we**” to include himself instead of “**you**” since he was also a believer? If spiritual blessings are all inclusive, then material blessings (if that is what Paul meant) must also be all inclusive, not just only the Corinthian believers or the gentiles.

#### **Understanding the background of 2 Corinthians 8:9**

In interpreting the Bible, whether a single verse, verses, or chapter, sometimes you need to look beyond the immediate verse or verses in order to get a full understanding of the text under consideration. For the sake of clarity, we will explore all the texts that will make us understand that Apostle Paul was not referring to financial richness as some have been made to believe.

### **A famine hits Jerusalem**

There was a great famine in Jerusalem which placed many of the Christians there in need. This famine was long prophesied by prophet Agabus. This is recognized in Acts chapter 11 as this:

*Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. Acts 11:27-30*

So we have a proof here that there was a great famine which necessitated for the appeal for contribution for the Jerusalem Church or saints.

### **The appeal for contribution for the Jerusalem saints.**

Before the contribution was made available and sent to Jerusalem, as recognized in Acts 11:27-30, an appeal was made by Apostle Paul to the gentile churches to make a contribution for the relief of the Jerusalem saints. Here is how Paul made his appeal to the Corinthian saints:

*Now concerning the collections for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4*

Apostle Paul did not only make this appeal to the Corinthians, but also to the other churches in the gentile nations, including the

churches in the region of Galatia to lay gifts aside so that when they arrived in those places, he would just pick the gifts to the Jerusalem Saints. The churches in Macedonia also contributed to the relief of the Jerusalem church as it was recognized by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians.

*Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the Churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,*  
2 Corinthians 8:1-4

In reminding the Corinthians about the grace of God in their lives, which they had benefitted through the death of Jesus Christ, Paul challenged them with the words:

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.* 2 Corinthians 8:9

Having considered the background for this verse, it is obvious that Paul was not suggesting that Jesus became poor in order to make the Corinthian Christians rich. The statement was made to challenge the Corinthians to fulfill their desire of contributing to the relief of the Jerusalem Church (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15).

**In what way was Jesus poor in order that they might become rich?**

1. Jesus Christ became poor when He assumed the human nature with its weaknesses. He emptied Himself and took a form of bond-servant to the point of going to the cross (Philippians 2:7-8)

2. Christ parents were poor according to the standard of riches in those days. We know this because they could not even afford a male lamb for their purification.

*But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle doves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean. Leviticus 12:8*

Now let us see if Mary could afford a lamb when her time for purification was due. Luke writes:

*And when the days for their purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLE DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS". Luke 2:22-24*

This is one of the proofs that Jesus Christ was poor materially; He did not come from a wealthy family. Not only does this verse show that He was poor; He also confirmed that He was poor per His own statement:

*As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow you wherever you go" And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Luke 9:57-58*

### **When and where was Jesus Christ rich before becoming poor?**

Christ richness was in heaven, not on this earth. Jesus was never rich on this earth and then later became poor, no; He was never materially rich in the first place. As God, he was rich in everything in heaven, including all the attributes of God. There never was a time in eternity past where He became destitute of any eternal quality. This eternal quality is what He set aside when He took a human form in order to die for the human race and make those who believe in Him spiritually rich.

### **What exactly is/are the riches being referred to?**

- a) The “rich” mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is a complete reference to spiritual riches in Christ. The riches are a shared riches; it is Christ eternal riches which He shares with us through His death, burial, and resurrection work. These riches are received instantly at the very moment any person believes in Jesus Christ.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Ephesians 1:3 (underlined words mine for emphasis).*

If you look at the grammar of Ephesians 1:3, you will notice that the verb tense is in perfect tense, which emphasizes an action which has already taken place. The Ephesian Christians had already received every spiritual blessing long before they received Paul's letter. The question is when did God invoke those blessings on them? Answer: God blessed them on the very day Apostle Paul preached the gospel of God's grace to them and they believed. This blessing is not a post salvation blessing; it is an instant blessing that continues forever.

### **Some Points To Note**

- b) Even though God has blessed each believer with every spiritual blessing, the enjoyment or experience of the blessings in our daily lives can only be realized through our

fellowship with His word and His Spirit.

- c) Even though God can choose to bless a believer financially or materially, the riches being referred to in 2 Corinthians 8:9 are never a financial or material blessings.
- d) God's riches or spiritual blessings are for both Christians who are financially poor and rich.
- e) Being financially or materially rich is never a proof of God's spiritual blessings. You can be the world's richest person as an unbeliever and remain spiritually poor. These divine blessings seek to improve our character, not our environment. Being conformed into the image of Christ is the proper proof of His riches.
- f) Jesus came to save us so that we can have the blessing/riches (possession of it) and have it abundantly (enjoyment of it). This is found in the verse below:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;  
I came that they may have life, and have it  
abundantly. John 10:10*

It is one thing to have something; it is another thing to enjoy it. You can have a smart phone (possess or own it) but never enjoy it to the fullest because of ignorance of how the phone is used. If you want to know other functions that the phone is capable of doing, you only need humility to learn it from someone else. You cannot enjoy the spiritual blessings/riches, if you do not even know them and what they are about.



## **Reasons why the “riches” cannot be referring to financial riches**

It is very easy for anybody to mistake the word, “rich” in 2 Corinthians 8:9 for financial and material riches when the fellow does not know that the word, “rich” does not always refer to money. Like salvation, the word can refer to different things in different contexts. Therefore, it is the context that should determine the meaning of the word. When I say, “Ghana is rich in Cocoa”, I do not mean that Ghana is monetarily rich. Or if I say, “Someone is rich in knowledge, it does not mean the person is financially rich. “Riches” refers to having abundance supply of something. That substance could be money, land, knowledge, technology, spiritual things (blessings) etc. So the use of the word by Paul in Corinthians 8:9 has nothing to do with money or finances.

## **The following points add to the reason that Paul was not referring to financial riches.**

- 1) It would be a contradictory statement if the "rich" in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is about financial or material richness. This is because God is faithful to His word and if Christ came purposely to make believers rich, then the Jerusalem Christians should not have been in any need, whether food, money or anything that they lacked.
- 2) There were also Christians in the city of Corinth who were poor in Paul's time, and some Christians are still poor today.

*What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.  
1 Corinthians 11:22*

So how could Paul's statement be referring to financial riches when clearly, there were financially poor Christians in his day? Some poor Christians were being ashamed in the Church because some carnal but financially rich Christians had brought communal meal in the church during their agape feast, and yet they would not even share with the poor among them. The point is, why must those Christians be poor in the first place? Did they not believe in Jesus Christ? You see, Jesus' saving work on the cross of cavalry is not to make the financially poor Christian rich or to make the already rich Christian more richer, no; that is not the purpose for Christ's coming.

Those Corinthian Christians who were financially or materially rich but carnal were rich not because they had believed in Jesus Christ. Many of them apparently were already rich before accepting Christ. Others too may have had their riches through genuine means of hard work in legitimate business while others may have gotten their wealth through fraud (1 Corinthians 6:8)

*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Ephesians 4:28*

The last part of the verse talks about those who have needs. If we think that Jesus' death was purposely to alleviate suffering and poverty, then why did the Ephesians Christians have some needy Christians among them? Should not eternal salvation have made them become rich people long time before receiving this letter from Paul?

### **Money and Ministry**

Money is needed to run ministry. Certain things in the local assembly can only be acquired with money; needy members will need some help too; pastors will have to be taken care of. Yes, money is needed to run a church and it is true that we all need money. But I think we should be careful not to project Christianity as a relationship that promises the blessings of money to those who

come to Christ. This teaching does not only put pressure on those who hear it, but it also makes them question their faith in God.

This teaching can also lead Christians to doubt the faithfulness of God's word. If you make Christians believe that God has assured them financial wealth, yet the reality is that they are facing all kinds of financial challenges and therefore not able to fulfill their financial obligations in many areas of their lives, do you think that the same people will believe the Bible? People talk about money as if they need money more than any other person, or as if they will get money by talking about it.

Look! it is not about emphasizing on money that gives you money; it is about having the opportunities through which money can be gained that matters. Over emphasis on money does not mean you have faith to get money more than the person who does not over emphasize it. The richest people in the world are not money talkers; they are people who identify opportunities and utilize those opportunities. Others too use their mental resources, material resources, and financial resources to take advantage of existing opportunities in order to make money. Just because many out there defraud or use gimmicks to get money from other Christians does not mean that should be the standard for all to follow.

**Romans 15:25-27 confirms that the word, “rich” in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is spiritual blessings (riches), not financial or material wealth.**

*But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they were indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. Romans 15:25-27 (underlined words mine for emphasis)*

Apostle Paul's statement here in the above passage refutes any idea that he (Paul) meant financial wealth when he used the phrase, “so

**that you through His poverty might become rich”** in 2 Corinthians 8:9. If Christ’s coming to the world was to make the poor rich, then that purpose would have been defeated since He could not remove poverty among the saints in Jerusalem. It is explicitly stated here in Roman 15:25-27 that some of the Christians in the Jerusalem Church were poor.

Also, we know for a fact that the Corinthian Christians, who were also Gentiles (prior to their salvation), were spiritually poor. No matter how materially or monetarily rich they looked prior to their salvation at the hearing of the gospel, they were completely poor in spiritual things. But their spiritual status changed from poverty to riches as soon as they entered into a new relationship with God through faith in the death of Christ.

The question we need to ask is: how did the Corinthians have access to the gospel of grace? They heard the gospel through the Jews. Initially, all the human agents of the gospel were Jews without exception. Christ, who sacrificed Himself for our great salvation was also a Jew; His apostles who traveled around the world with the gospel message were all Jews. So the Corinthian Christians became spiritually rich through the Jerusalem Church/saints. If the saints in Jerusalem had not traveled to the city of Corinth, they had no way of hearing the good news since they were not part of commonwealth of Israel.

Now that the Corinthian Christians' spiritual destituteness/poverty had been resolved through the messengers from Jerusalem, it was reasonable for them also to provide material or financial support during such time of need. This is the reason that Paul said in verse 27, **They** (Corinthian saints) were indebted to **them** (Jerusalem saints).

Bible truth is not communicated in just one place, verse, or chapter. Therefore, pastors must learn the skill needed for collecting specific doctrinal data. The skill will enable him to synthesize or put all the pieces together so that the Bible can make sense. But no one can acquire this skill without the study of proper hermeneutics.

As you can see, 2 Corinthians 8:9 alone cannot be enough for us to understand what Paul meant.

Even though the Corinthian Christians understood Paul clearly, we cannot just understand the statement by relying on that single verse. The background of Paul's statement was already known to the Corinthians. But for us today, we need to learn the background by putting the isolated data together so that the whole background information connected to Paul's statement can be understood.

Therefore, to understand the Bible is not about memorizing and quoting verses; rather, it is about understanding the verse in context in relation to other verses or passages elsewhere. The beauty of inspiration is that, when the Apostles wrote about specific doctrines, they made it clearer in other places of scripture. The average Christian does not know how the Bible is to be interpreted; it is the pastor's duty to learn and share this skill(s) of interpreting the scripture. And I must say that this skill does not come easy; it comes by a lot of sweat and hard work through diligent study as God in His grace continues to enlighten the mind of the humble believer or Bible student who is properly following proper hermeneutics or rules that govern communication.

As we can see, we started from 2 Corinthian 8:9, but we ended up in Romans 15:25-27 for more clarification; and at the end of the day, all the pieces or parts were properly fitted together. And this saves us from the preconceived idea that Paul was referring to material riches. Again, the Holy Spirit does not infuse an interpretation into our minds, nor does He give us a pressing or some kind of irresistible thought so that such a pressing thought now becomes what the Holy Spirit is saying about a verse or passage, no. This is never the way that the Holy Spirit teaches. The Holy Spirit never teaches independently of following the rules governing communication. Therefore, failing to learn hermeneutics will lead to failure of interpreting the Bible correctly. No amount of sincerity or Holy Spirit can help the individual to get his Bible interpretation right if he fails to learn and apply the rule that govern interpretation or communication. Once you miss the rule, you will definitely get your interpretation wrong.

## CHAPTER 6

### **“Healing” Does Not Always Mean Physical Healing**

*And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed.<sup>25</sup> For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls. 1 Peter 2:24-25 (underlined words mine for emphasis)*

Verse 24 of 1 Peter chapter 2 is one of those verses that have received distortions. The distortions often occur when the reader or interpreter fails to follow the rules governing interpretation. The word, “healing”, “heal”, or “healed” does not always refer to physical healing of a sick person. Unfortunately, many who do not know this have taken the word “healed” here to mean physical healing. Once that position is taken, the entire meaning of the passage is lost. You cannot misinterpret a Bible passage without being affected by your application of that passage. For it is not a surprise thing that those who see the verse as physical healing verse normally apply or quote it to the sick Christian. By quoting this to the sick Christian, the impression is created that He (Christ) has assured them of physical healing.

**Context:** Apostle Peter made this statement in the middle of a letter he was writing to his audience. The statement was made when Peter was talking about the doctrine of Christian suffering (see 1 Peter Chapter 2, beginning from verse 18). He then added that Christians are called to follow the steps of Christ in suffering. In other words, how did Christ respond when He suffered unjustly? (See verse 21). He answers the question in verse 23 by stating that Christ always committed His unjust treatment to God the Father who judged and judges righteously. Since as unbelievers we did not have any power on our own to endure injustices, Christ's death for our sins has brought us into a relationship that is targeted at righteous living,

including suffering unjustly whilst casting the matter into God's hand, an example set by our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

**Grammar:** The perfect tense, present tense, and future tense are used for a purpose. When tenses are ignored in interpretation, the true meaning of a text is lost. If a past tense is taken out of context to mean a future tense or a promise, the very doctrine that is being emphasized by the writer will be lost from one's interpretation. The phrase, “*for by His wounds you were healed*” is not a future tense; neither is it a promise to heal the sick believer; it is simply a fact about an already accomplished event. The accomplishment took place in the past. At the time that Peter penned this letter, his audience had already been **healed**. The phrase does not say, “for by His wound you **\*shall** be healed”. It is not a promise to be claimed; it is simply a truth to be known

**Mood:** As already stated, Peter is declaring a fact, but not promising anything. The mood expressed here is indicative, but not imperative or optative. Imperative mood expresses a command while optative mood expresses a wish. But the phrase “*for by His wounds you were healed*” neither shows a command nor a wish; it is simply a statement of fact. In other words, Peter was not telling his audience that Christ died for them in order to heal their physical sicknesses, and that they should claim healing. The problem with making the phrase a 'physical healing verse' is that, it totally changes the doctrine that Peter was communicating.

**Voice:** Peter's audience (and by extension, us) received the action. It is not an action that Christians could or can produce; they can only receive it.

### **What is this healing about?**

- ☞ When a soldier gets healed from a gunshot, it means he has been cured from the injuries that were caused by the bullets.

- ✍ People suffering from Malaria may take medication and get healed
- ✍ Jesus prayed for many sick persons and healed them.
- ✍ People get healed from emotional pains that they go through as they are counseled by the word of God or other persons.

While the word can be used in all these senses, it is also used in spiritual sense toward God and man. God created a meaningful relationship between Adam and Himself but was destroyed by Adam. For this reason, the entire human race was separated from God. God in His grace brought His only Son to die as a substitute for our sins so that we could be healed from our spiritual death. Therefore, spiritual death means separation from God

The physical death of Jesus Christ on the cross has made this healing (restoration) possible to everyone who believes that Jesus Christ died for his/her sins. It was this very healing that Peter had in mind when he wrote his epistle. The next verse (verse 25) clarifies the issue of spiritual healing or restoration. The verse tells us the reason why we needed healing, cure, or restoration back to relationship with God:

*For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25.*

Peter recognized that his audience were once unbelievers but they have now **returned** (completed action). The return was possible because of what Christ did on the cross.

**Conclusion:** when peter used the phrase, “*for by His wounds you were healed*”, he was simply referring to a cure or restoration of a lost relationship, but not a physical healing to a sick Christian.



### **What should Christians do when they are sick?**

Sickness is one of the things that came into the world as a result of Adam's fall. Even though Christ has died for our sins, the effect of Adam's sin still affects us. This is because the time for the removal of the effect of sin is not due. This explains why there is suffering in the world. Christians will finally lose their suffering body and put on a glorious body at the rapture of the church. Also when Christ finally returns to the earth, the curse on the land and on man's environment will all be removed. God is in the process of restoring what Adam lost. For the meantime, what He is restoring is a relationship between a sinful man and Himself. So Christians still possess a suffering body. Since sickness is part of the problems in this world, Christians need to pray to God when they experience it. We are told that in everything we must pray to God.

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (underlined word mine emphasis)*

**“Everything”** in the passage above has no exception. This means that sickness is not an exception. Therefore, when Christians are sick, they are to pray by making their request for healing known to God. A specific result is promised to those who make their request known to God. Interestingly, Paul does not say that God will give us whatever we pray for, whether healing, money, house, Job, etc. Instead, verse 7 promises the believer a peace of God. This means that God is capable of taking away the worry that possesses our minds as a result of certain challenges that we go through, including health challenges.

While God may or may not give us the exact physical thing we pray for, including healing, He is able to solve the anxiety problem which the physical needs may have created. God wants us to be happy and stable in mind regardless of our present circumstances. We do not have to be happy only when our problems are solved; that will not make us see the power of His word. It is when we are weak (because of certain lacks or sufferings), that His power (from the word and prayer) is made perfect in us (see 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Therefore, a suffering Christian must continue to take in the word of God and pray so that God will continue to supply him/her with the necessary divine power that is needed to endure whatever pain that he/she is going through.

Even though God can heal (that is why we pray to him), 1 Peter 2:24 is not a verse or a text that promises physical healing. Having this knowledge will save a Christian from any expectation that God has not guaranteed.

## CHAPTER 7

### **False Teachers Are Judged By Their Teachings**

*You will know them by **their fruits**. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? Matthew 7:16*

*So then, you will know them by **their fruits**. Matthew 7:20*

Do you remember when this verse or statement is normally quoted? Many Christians quote this verse, especially when they see other Christians behave in a way that is not Christ-like. Because of this practice, many have thought that the 'fruit' that Jesus talked about was a reference to the behavior of some carnal or unfaithful Christians. This kind of explanation actually takes away the true meaning of the text. It makes a Christian who reads the Bible today assume that the fruit Jesus talked about in those verses are simply referring to the sinful outward behavior of other Christians.

So how can we know what Jesus meant when He said, "by their fruits you shall know them"? The only way to understand the text is to pay attention to the context, and the pronouns used by Jesus, and also by knowing the different ways in which the Bible uses the word, "fruit".

#### **The things that fruit (s) represents in the Bible**

1. Fruit is used in the literal sense as product or fruit from a plant (Gen. 3:2)
2. Love is also described as fruit when manifested through the believer (John. 15:2, 16)
3. The outworking of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit of the believer is called fruit (Gal. 5:22)
4. Christian giving/offerings is also described as a fruit (Rom. 15:28)
5. Repentance is also described as fruit in the context of John

- the Baptist's ministry ( Matt. 3:18)
6. When Christians are growing spiritually, it is also described as fruit (Rom.1:13; Phil. 1:11)
  7. A baby is described as the fruit of the womb; for it is a product of what the womb was designed to do (Ps. 127:3)
  8. Believing in Jesus Christ or accepting Him as the Jewish messiah is also described as fruit (Matt. 21:43)
  9. The gospel is also said to be producing fruit when it is saving men (Col. 1:5)
  10. A prophet's teaching is also described as fruit (Matt. 7:15-20, 12:33-37; Deut. 18:19-22)

From the highlights above, we notice that, the word, "fruit" is used to represent different things in different contexts, and therefore it will not be right to transport the use of the word in Galatians 5:22 (point 3) to Matthew 7: 15-20 (point 10). This type of error is what James Barr (1961 as cited in Joseph C. Dillow, 1992, P.29) call "illegitimate totality transfer". In interpreting the Bible, we should avoid the assumption that the meaning of a particular word cuts across all passages of scripture. Such transfer of one meaning in a passage to another is very dangerous and leads to Bible distortion.

### **Pay attention to pronouns**

One of the keys to saving yourself from teaching things the Bible never teaches is to pay attention to pronouns when dealing with certain passages in the Bible, especially in the four gospels. In those verses, we have the pronouns, "you", and the possessive pronoun, "their". It is important we realize that "you" and "their" cannot be referring to the same people or group.

The context of the text brings us to the middle of Matthew 7:15, where Jesus was giving a warning. So the legitimate question is, to whom was Jesus warning, and to whom was the warning about? The warning directly went to His disciples; and they were to beware of another group described in verse 15 as "false prophets". Even though Jesus was speaking to His disciples at that moment, what He was referring to was not about them (disciples).

When a speaker is speaking directly to a specific audience or group, it does not necessarily mean that everything he says at that time is about (refers to) the people to whom he/she speaks. I can have a thirty minutes chat with you, yet the discussion might be about different person.

The second person pronoun, "You" refers to the disciples while the third person possessive pronoun, "their" refers to the false prophets. The false prophets or those who claimed to be speaking God's word in Jesus time were the Pharisees. Before we go to Matthew chapter 12:33-37 and analyze what the fruit is about, let us look at our context again.

*Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 so every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad fruit produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 so then, you will know them by their fruits.*

### **How can we know who a false prophet is?**

We cannot know a false prophet by the way he dresses; the way he eats; the places he visits; the occasions he attends; the music he listens to; the car he drives; and even the way he talks. Anyone who uses outward behavior as a criterion to determine who a false prophet is will always be deceived. The “works of the flesh” must not be confused with the “fruit of a false prophet”. Any Christian who is not walking in the spirit is powerless in his spiritual walk with God, and therefore can commit any of the sins of the flesh.

But the fruit of a false prophet is specifically about the prophet's speech or his words; not how he speaks (the style of presentation), but what he speaks (content of the message). The fruit of a prophet is simply the message of the prophet, that is, the exact message that he teaches; nothing more nothing less. So the emphasis on the fruit,

as it is used in this context, is about the message or the teachings of the false prophet. This is the reason that Christ likened them to wolves in sheep's clothing.

Notice that Jesus Christ did not say the false prophets come to you with **sheep's voice**. Wolves often look like sheep, outwardly. A wolf, in order to devour a sheep can join a flock of sheep and as they move, He preys on one of them. The shepherd cannot easily spot a wolf as it moves along with the flock. The shepherd or the sheep can only spot the wolf when it yells. Wolf yells or howls while sheep bleats. The sounds or "cry" of these two animals are different while their bodies or skin can look similar.

The yelling of a wolf represents the voice, speech, message, or teachings of a false teacher who imitates Christian principles and practices, but rejects the core teachings of the Christian faith. This is the idea behind Christ's analogy of a wolf in a sheep's clothing. It is an analogy based on the true natures of those two animals.

The disciples of Jesus Christ had no way of knowing who a false teacher was unless the false messenger spoke and expressed his beliefs. So the only way to know what (content) a person believes is not by looking at his dressing, shoes, or house; but by listening to his words or teachings as he is engaged into any discussion of the things of God. This was the only way the disciples were going to identify the wolves (the false prophets/Pharisees) in a sheep's clothing.

**Jesus confirms the fact that a false prophet can hide his character, but he cannot hide his voice, that is, his teachings.**

Jesus, having warned his disciples to be cautious about the false prophets in Matthew 7:15, goes further to emphasize on the teachings or words of the false prophets in Matthew 12:33-37. There, it is made clear that Jesus was referring to the Pharisees. This is obvious as one looks at the entire context from Matthew 12:22-42. Jesus never called his disciples, "brood of vipers". The phrase was both used by Jesus and John the Baptists; and each time it was

used, the Pharisees were the target (see Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33). In the passage below, Jesus' teachings imply that a false prophet or wolf in a sheep's clothing cannot hide or pretend about his beliefs or teachings just as a wolf can not pretend and imitate the voice of a sheep. This is impossible thing to do

*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.<sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.<sup>35</sup> The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of evil treasure what is evil.<sup>36</sup> But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.<sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Matthew 12:33-37 [underlined words mine for emphasis]*

Whatever a man believes cannot be separated from his teachings or words; his beliefs will always come out when he opens his mouth just as a mango tree will surely bring forth mango fruit. That is why the underlined words, “word(s)” and “speak” are recurrent in the passage. The Pharisees' outward behavior was very deceptive, and relying on their outward behavior to determine their faith would cause one to make a wrong conclusion about them. According to Jesus, their outward behavior appeared nice, but their inward character was not. This is how Jesus described them:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.<sup>28</sup> so you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew. 23:27-28*

Since the Pharisees appeared righteous or beautiful to men on the outward, the only way they could be known as wolves in sheep's clothing was when they opened their mouth and taught. So we

should not be surprised that Jesus did not emphasize on their outward behavior, but their teachings as I have indicated by the underlined words in Matthew 12:33-37.

In conclusion, the phrase, “you will know them by their fruits” is not a criterion for determining who a Christian is. Jesus was not talking about other Christians who were different from his disciples; He was, in context referring to the Pharisees.

In the same way, a Christian can only be known by his/her words about Christ. While it is expected that a Christian demonstrates a good behavior, behavior is never the standard or criterion for knowing who a Christian is. Unbelievers (example: the Pharisees) could demonstrate certain good behavior that appears as Christian virtue; but to look at such virtue and conclude that they were Christians is a failure to detect a wolf in a sheep's clothing. No matter how good a person is, you cannot know what his/her beliefs are until you hear his/her response as expressed in words when they hear the Gospel.

For our application, the only way that any Christian can identify a false teacher on Tv, Radio or in a Church, is to carefully listen to the content of his message. Sincerity is not the standard of identifying a false preacher. A preacher can be very sincere, yet with false content of message. Once you see that a preacher's message or content is different from the teaching of the Apostles in the New Testament, immediately, know that the person is teaching falsely.



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **3 John 2 Is Not A Promise**

*Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper  
and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.*  
3 John 2

Many have said that this verse is a proof that a Christian must not be sick, and that it is not the will of God for Christians to be sick. Quite frankly it is very difficult for me to see where that interpretation fits in 3 John 2. It is not the will of God that a Christian should fall sick simply because Apostle John prayed or wished that Gaius prospered in good health? Is this argument enough to make that conclusion? Of course, it is not God's will that so many things happen in life, yet they do happen.

For example, it was never God's will for Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they ate it; it was never God's will for the Israelites of the exodus generation to disobey Him when they had been commanded to go and conquer the land, yet they disobeyed Him by failing to go to the promised land. Again, it was never God's will that the Jews rejected their savior, yet they did.

Someone may ask, so you mean it was God's will for Gaius to be sick? Well, the point is simple; Apostle John did not write it anywhere in his letter to Gaius whether it was God's will for him (Gaius) to be sick or not. In fact, the issue is not whether it is God's will for Christians to be sick or not; it is a matter of why Christians get sick or are capable of getting sick? That is what it is important to consider. Does the Bible teach it anywhere that being a Christian saves one from getting sick? If the answer is no, then we should be careful so that we do not build a teaching that does not exist in the scripture. The fact that something is not God's will does not stop it from happening. We need to understand where we are coming from and where we are going. As Christians, we have to understand that we have a weak body (because of Adam's fall), and we are heading towards the possession of a glorious body

(because we have believed in Jesus Christ). But before we receive this glorious or resurrection body at the rapture of the church, we must learn to face the facts that are presented in the Bible.

**John simply prayed for Gaius, wishing that he would be in good health; he did not say, “It was not God's will for Gaius to be sick”**

The context of 3 John 1-8 presents to us a faithful brother in the Christian faith, whose name was called, Gaius. This Christian Brother was a good man who was always showing love to every Christian who visited him. John got to hear of Gaius's application of God's word in his personal life. In fact, this news brought gladness to John since Gaius act of love is all that Christianity aims at.

Apparently, Gaius health had gone bad to an extent and for that matter the Christians who traveled to where John was stationed broke this news to him. Apostle John did exactly what every loving Christian would do when he/she hears that something has happened to a loved one. As Christians, what do we do when a friend's health is bad? The obvious answer is simple: we pray for the person, believing that God might heal the person. Does God always heal Christian brothers and sisters who are sick after we have lifted them up in prayer? Of course not all the time; sometimes we see miracle, where the sick person's condition improves and becomes better; other times too, the sick person's condition even gets worse, and some finally die. How do we explain a situation like this as Christians? Must we say our prayers were not powerful enough? Or we must blame the sick person that he/she did not have faith?

Prayers fall under request; and it is the reasonable thing to do as Christians when we have problems, whether it is about our own personal problems or someone else's problem. However, there is no guarantee that every prayer we say, we will get the exact result that we are expecting. That kind of thought is unscriptural; it conflicts reality, and it contradicts the experiences of many Christians in the Bible who were sick or had problems in life. Prayer is not designed to give us what we want; rather, it is designed so that what God wants would happen in our lives. John did the right thing for praying for Gaius. The question is: was Gaius healed because John prayed for him? We do not know what happened to Gaius since nothing was said about him again.

### **Some Reasonable Thoughts to Ponder on**

1. Before the Christian brothers got to Apostle John's station to inform him about Gaius' good deeds and health challenge, had Gaius not been prayed for by those Christian brothers who stayed with him or had visited him?
2. Did not Gaius himself pray for good health? We do not know how long Gaius had experienced this health challenge, but then, if he had been praying or others had been praying for him till John heard the news, why had he not received healing?
3. If the flawed argument that “a Christian must/should not be sick” is anything to go by, then why was Gaius sick in the first place? Was he not a Christian? If he was, then the argument that a Christian must not be sick is defeated.
4. Is there any statement in scripture that explicitly or implicitly states that a believer cannot, must not, or should not be sick? If no is the answer, then why do some ministers make a big issue out of 3 John 2 as if it is a promise to be claimed for healing?
5. Timothy was sick and suffered from stomach pain. No matter how long Timothy had prayed, the Bible's record for us is that, the young man was still having that challenge as at the time that he received letters from Paul. Do you want to tell me that Timothy never prayed for the removal that pain? or do you think Paul never prayed for Timothy?
6. Did people get sick because they wanted to be sick? I do not think so. Nobody desires to be sick, yet we sometimes fall sick?

## Self-deceit

There is nothing “spiritual” or “faith” about denying reality. It is not a sin to accept or agree to the fact. Denying facts and calling it faith is unscriptural. Such defense mechanism is not warranted in the Bible. “faithing it and claiming it” are all human teachings that contribute to self-deceit among many Christians. The teaching is purely human and does not exist in the scriptures. The spiritual life is a life of humility where the believer must recognize his/her problems and use the resources that the Lord has provided to solve them. If you live on denial and claim that your problem does not exist, how are you going to humbly rely on God and His resources?

Did John ask Gaius to deny his health challenge? If John did not ask Gaius to do that, then why do we tell members in our congregation to deny their health issues, by interpreting such denial as positive confession? Where in the scripture do we have the supposed positive confession? There is no “faith” in denial; it is simply a lie and a sin. Throughout the scriptures, God or Bible writers were never ashamed to face a reality by describing what something was.

If people were rich, the Bible recognized it; if people were poor, the Bible recognized it; if people disobeyed God, the Bible recognized and condemned it; and if people obeyed God, the Bible recognized it. In the same way, if people were sick, including Christians, the Bible recognized it; so what is the shame or lack of faith in telling the truth or agreeing to the fact or reality of one’s problem? Why have we allowed certain human teachings to dominate our thinking and actions when clearly we cannot find those teachings in the scriptures?

For example, Apostle Paul did not ask Timothy to deny his stomach pains by believing that by relying on denial and calling it “faith” or “positive confession”, somehow would eliminate the pain.

*No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. 1 Timothy 5:23.*

Not only did Timothy have stomach troubles, but he also experienced frequent ailments. This verse suggests to us that, Timothy likely had certain chronic sickness. What is so important to remind ourselves with is that, Paul did not hide or pretend about what Timothy was going through. He had walked with Paul for years but the Lord chose not to heal him, for a reason best known to God. Whether in later years God had mercy and healed Timothy, we do not know. Let us look at another example:

*But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; <sup>26</sup> because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him alone but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Philippians 2:25-27. [Underlined words mine for emphasis]*

This Bible passage above is indeed a true confession of a reality. The word “confession” simply means to acknowledge; to acknowledge what? answer: to acknowledge fact, thus: reality. Paul acknowledged the true reality and health experience of his friend without any denial or pretence. If the supposed positive confession teaching today was a true biblical doctrine, Apostle Paul would have been the one to emphasize it. Clearly, those who believe in “positive confession” and “word of faith” theology have been deceived. The Bible knows nothing concerning that teaching.

### **Why do Christians get sick?**

As far as the logic of some Christians are concerned, Christians are not to get sick; or even if they get sick, they must be healed. They believe that Jesus' death took away sin, including sicknesses, and for that matter, Christians should not be sick. The weakness in this argument is that, it does not pay attention to the teachings in the Bible. Those who advocate these teachings do not compare their teachings with the teachings in the New Testament. They talk more about “faith” as if they have faith, or believe in “faith” than anyone else.

Jesus died for our sins; that is correct. And it is also true that sickness came to mankind because of sin. However, Jesus' death saved us from the penalty of sin, that is, spiritual death and consequently going to the lake of fire. His death has not eliminated sin in our human body; we still possess sin, also called “flesh” in certain passages of scripture. Not only is sin not eliminated, but also Christ's death has not eliminated the effect of sin in the universe. The curse pronounced on the land to bear thorns has not been eliminated. This fact is clear and observable in the world.

Hatred between man and certain animals like snake, lion, etc, have not been eliminated. This fact is also clear and observable in the world. Even though Christ's death has provided forgiveness for our sins, the effect of sin on our physical body and the universe has not been eliminated yet. It is obvious that Christians grow old; Christians possess weak body; Christians die. Just because we believe in Christ does not mean that those conditions cannot or must not happen to us. We have to understand that we are not living in Heaven or in the resurrection body at this moment of our lives.

God's salvation program is not only for mankind but also for the entire creation. Even creation itself longs to be delivered from the effect of sin (Romans 8:19-23). What God is doing presently is that, He is solving the problem that Adam's sin has caused; but we should know that He is doing that progressively. There is time for everything; there is time to be born, and there is time to die; there is time for man to be saved from going to the lake of fire; there is time for the saved ones (saints) to be saved from the weak body; There is time for God to remove the enmity between man, the snake, and the lion. Therefore, Christian should bear in mind that Christ's saving work on the cross is not about solving the present environmental and health problems of mankind; He is going to do that, but that will be in the future when He return to the earth.

This is what we should understand; we possess a weak body. This weak body is capable of falling sick. Once we possess our glorious or resurrection body in the future, we will never be sick again. But so long as we possess this weak body, we are not free from anything that can

affect the body, including sickness, aging, and death. Moreover, the environment is already polluted and contributes to the poor health of the body. The Bible does not lie or deny all these realities; and that is why it is a dangerous thing for anyone to tell other Christians to deny these realities. Therefore, Christians get sick not because they do not have faith, but because they possess a body that is capable of getting infections or growing weak.

In conclusion, we should understand that 3John 2 is not about a promise for healing, neither is it teaching Christians to deny their health conditions and then call the denial, “positive confession” This information must not escape us. We should remember that ignorance is about lack of information in the mind. The only way that ignorance can be removed is by feeding the mind with the needed information. Let us all become an agents for the removal of ignorance in this era of Biblical ignorance.

**Here are some benefits of studying biblical hermeneutics:**

1. It saves a Christian from believing in the things that are not scriptural.
2. It saves or guides a Christian from ignorantly passing unto other Christians the same false information that he has learned.
3. It helps a Christian, especially a pastor, to correct his previous wrong teachings. This is always not easy, but it is very important thing to do, knowing that God will judge us for the things that we teach. Therefore, we always need to come to the text ready to be corrected and changed.
4. It also helps a Christian to defend the Christian faith/doctrines- that is, the teachings of the Apostles, but not denominational beliefs.

If you have found this material helpful, kindly recommend it to friends, pastors, families, and Bible schools, so that they can also

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