



Choices, Key to Destiny

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What comes to you in life is not a function primarily of your dreams, aspirations or plans. It is not necessarily what you looked for that you get. I know that a lot of the books we have read on success and motivation have emphasized goals, dreams and desires. These things are all important, but you need to understand that life is deeper than your desires, deeper than simply your dreams, and deeper than your imaginations. These have their roles to play, but there are yet other factors that must stand as foundations before they can have any relevance.

You definitely have met people who had visions, dreams and plans, who worked fervently towards these goals and yet they all came to nothing. It reminds one of when God told the nation of Israel that they look for much but behold, it comes to little (Haggai 1:9).

I met a man once while I was yet involved in clinical practice; this man was admitted in the clinic where I worked with severe chest pains. He was in his early forties. The diagnosis was angina pectoris, a heart condition. His blood pressure was very high and he was in obvious distress; the pressures of life had gotten to his heart. As a doctor there is something I observed frequently with adult patients in severe physical distress that you usually do not see in children in similar situations; that thing is fear — a feeling of impending doom. You see it on their faces. This man had it when he was rushed in.

In the course of his stay, we talked about life and the gospel of Jesus; he made a statement that touched me, a very young man then, and set me thinking. A lot of those thoughts I'll share in this short message. He said, "Doc, I can't call myself lazy. I think I work as hard as anyone else. I go about my business early in the morning, but nothing seems to come out of it. I don't know what the problem is."

He looked for much, but was only able to gather little.

The question one needs to ask is, why?

I have studied the word of God to some extent, and the Lord has granted me some understanding. One of the things I have come to understand that may answer our question is what I am sharing in this book.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATHS OF LIFE

I have come to understand that life is in paths, and that all you can do is to choose a path for your life. Each path has its destination which has been preset by God's wisdom. You cannot choose where a path will lead; this has been framed by the word of God. What a person is able to do is to choose the path that he or she will follow. This is why the Lord repeatedly calls out to people to carefully make a choice of the path that they will follow.

Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls. (Jer 6:16)

It is the path that you choose in life that takes you somewhere; not your intentions. If I set out with the strongest of intentions to go from Lagos to Abuja but place myself on the road to Benin, it is Benin I will reach after much labour; my intentions or sincerity notwithstanding. This is why the Lord enjoined us to ask. It is very much like getting to a bus or train station; you do not just enter a bus without asking where it is going except you do not plan to go anywhere. This is just the way life is; it is in paths, each leading somewhere that we must enquire about before setting on it.

Desire will not get you anywhere in this life; dreams will not get you there. What will get you to the place of your desire is for you to choose the way that leads to it.

How do you choose a path in life?

Your actions and your manner of life are the things that show the path that you are walking on!

A good example to illustrate what we are saying here is a student who desires and dreams of a good result in all his examinations but spends his time partying, watching movies and reading novels; it is clear that such a one has chosen the way of failure.

Now, this is a very glaring example; we all can understand the mechanism and so can easily trace the 'cause-and-effect' of it. Unfortunately, most things in life, though having similar cause-and-effect relationships, are not always so

obvious to everyone. For this cause many tread on the paths of destruction not knowing that they are being led to failure and death. As an example, there is a young man who does not honour his father or his mother; he has made a choice of a road that leads to a short life, devoid of prosperity, yet he desires a long and prosperous one.

See, many issues in life appear small and insignificant but have very dire consequences, but many people treat them with levity because of ignorance. When the consequences come, the cause is usually neither recognised nor remembered. For example, people break promises without remorse; they borrow and do not pay back; and they engage in extra-marital sex without thinking anything of all these. Yet, assuredly there will be consequences. Many people who are poor today in their middle ages and the later parts of their lives did these things when they were young and that is the reason why they are imprisoned in poverty for ever. Many have died young for reasons they will only find out on the day of judgement; they did not realise they were courting death. There is what the Bible calls the temporal sweetness of an evil thing which, it also says, afterwards fills the mouth with gravel (Prov 20:17).

Again let me say it: Life is made up of paths; your blessedness is determined by the one you are walking in.

Blessed is the man who walketh... (Ps 1:1KJV)

Where you will get to in this life of yours is a function of the path that you have chosen; each path has a destination, and you can only choose your destination by choosing the road you will travel on.

CHAPTER 3

LIMITED HORIZON

Choices in life are made based on knowledge and understanding. By this I mean the facts we are aware of and the interpretation we give to those facts. These are the things that we are said to see.

Most people do not see well. They do not recognize the path they are on. They take a road and do not have any idea where it is leading them to; they just assume it is good to travel a nice looking road. There was such a person described in the book of Proverbs; he walked on a path that he did not know would cost him his life (Prov 7:23). He was enticed by the flattering lips of an adulteress. He followed her, the Bible says, like an ox goes to the slaughter. He went on to his death. Many are still with him on that road. No wonder we have been warned that there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Prov 14:12). Notice that it seems right.

What appears to the eyes is often not the truth of the matter; there is very frequently more than meets the eye. It is an establish truth that “not all that glitter is gold.” True of jewels; true of life.

What a thing seems to promise is not necessarily what you will get. If I put you in my car and face the Benin road while promising you that we are on our way to Abuja; my promise is irrelevant as it is Benin we will soon reach. This is why wisdom cries:

“O naive ones, discern prudence; and, O fools, discern wisdom.

“Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the man who listens to me...” (Prov 8:5,33-34)

This is what I need for you to see: it is as you heed instruction that you become wise. It is not experience that you need but instruction. You cannot by yourself make the right choice; you MUST be taught. God's word must teach you. He said,

Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. (Prov 7: 24)

This is why the word of God comes to us every day. This is why the Lord sends instructions our way. We must be careful to learn what the correct path is in life.

It is unfortunate that what people do commonly in life is usually not the correct thing. As absurd as it may seem, the truth is that most people are wrong. This is the meaning of the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, "the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it" (Matt 7:13). I remember then when I had just gotten married and was trying to teach my wife a lot of things about marriage; I said many things that were too different from the way most marriages were operated. At a point my wife asked me whether I thought all the other people were wrong. Now it was a difficult question to answer as my obvious answer would have sounded quite arrogant. I tactfully suggested to her to recall to mind that in the whole of the congregation of the nation of Israel in the wilderness, there was a time that, without counting Moses, only Joshua and Caleb were right. I explained to her that I was teaching what I did not learned from my own experience (I had never been married before then) nor that of other people, but that which was taught me by the Spirit from the word of God.

See, people's experiences cannot tell you the correct way in life. Your friends do not know the truth about sex and about relationships; they do not know the things that really matter in life. This is a problem with many young people today; they are concerned about the opinion of their friends and peers whereas it is only the word of God that can tell anyone what is right and each has the responsibility to seek to hear what it is saying.

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. (Ps 34:11)

What the Psalmist is saying here is that what you think you have known is not the fear of God. It is only by listening to the instruction of the word that you learn the fear of God.

Please be careful of what is called good advice; make sure you seek advice from those that have understanding of the things of God. I recollect how one day I sat and watched a TV programme in which a young woman was teaching

children about sex. These children were secondary school kids of ages between 12 and 16. One of them asked, “who can I have sex with?” To that she answered, “sex is so important that if you must have sex with someone, you must really love that person.” I almost jumped out of my skin.

You must really love the person?! That is your answer to kids? I cursed her from my heart for misleading those children. How are they supposed to know what love is and who they love? A passing attraction and a run of hormones is love to a kid! She was definitely a wrong person to instruct kids.

My brother and my sister, follow the word of God in choosing a path for your life. Once you have chosen a path, the consequences are automatic; you will not have to labour for them. If the path that you chose is one that leads to prosperity, then the blessings will chase after and overtake you. The same principle applies if you choose the opposite road; you will be overwhelmed by troubles you will not ask for.

Your personal duty therefore is to take the care to look for the right paths in life and walk in them. Take care to look before you leap.

“Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer 6:16)

You see that what you will find in life is a product of the road you are walking on; not of struggles or of desires. It is where you walk that determines what you get.

CHAPTER 4

CHOICES

Thus far, we have seen that life moves on automatically and that we can only change where we are going by switching from one road to another. At this time we need to see exactly how this is done.

Choices — that is the key. The choices we make in every thing that we are involved in and in every situation are the things that steer our lives into various paths or roads.

As you move on in life, you will always get to a crossroad where you have to decide whether to turn left or to turn right, where you will have to choose to do one thing or another. It is the point Joseph got to where he had to decide whether to sleep with Mrs Portiphar or run. It was at such a point where Saul the king had to decide whether to offer the sacrifice or wait for Samuel the prophet. This is the point where the young lady will decide whether it is time for sex or time to refuse. It is whether to take the money or go hungry. It is to tell a lie and be free or tell the truth and be punished. It is either left or right; you have to turn one way. It is at these points that you actually determine which roads you are travelling on.

My friend, it is at such points that the Lord in heaven pays close attention to find out what is in your heart. All the angels are waiting. And all the devils too.

Will Job hold to his faith in the midst of all the suffering, or will he save himself all the pain by cursing God?

What will Solomon ask for now that the Lord has given him an open cheque? Ask for anything, the Lord had said.

Will Daniel rather please God and die when asked not to pray to any other god but the king, or displease God while pleasing the king and live?

These are the points of choices.

Now note this: This is what God rewards - the choice you make.

And God said to Solomon, "Because you had this in mind, and did not ask for riches, wealth, or honor, or the life of those who hate you, nor have you even

asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge, that you may rule My people, over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed, nor those who will come after you. " (2 Chron 1:11-12)

God determined to bless Solomon because of the choice that he made. This is how you put your feet on the proper road to walk: Anytime that you are at those cross roads of life and you have to make a choice, you must remember that there is a choice that will please God and there is the other that will displease Him. You will be rewarded for choosing what pleases God.

For thus says the LORD, to the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off. (Isa 56:4-5)

The abundance of the blessings of God that came upon Solomon was as a consequence of the fact that he made a choice that pleased God. Please know that it is possible to make the Lord glad. When men do this, they invoke a blessing upon themselves.

However, when they make choices that displeased Lord, they invoke a curse and a punishment upon their own heads.

I will destine you for the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear and you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight." (Isa 65:12)

The choices you are making today are shaping your tomorrow. The only control that God has given you over your destiny is the ability to make choices; you cannot choose the outcome of those choices. Oswald Chambers said, "I have the ability to choose my actions but I do not have the power to choose the consequences of my actions."

Your choice is the power of your life, and that is why God continually puts a demand on it. Often you hear things like "choose you this day who you will serve. You hear it said, "choose life that you may live".

The question to you today is “what are you choosing in this life?” You need to understand that the fear of God is a choice that people make (Prov 1:29). You can make up your mind that henceforth you will only do the things that are pleasing in the sight of the Lord — that is called the fear of God. In the same vein, you can make up your mind like Mary to follow hard after the knowledge of the word of God. Jesus said that she chose the good part by so doing (Luke 10:42).

As we have seen, your choice will determine the outcome of your life; it is therefore necessary not just to have desires but to check by the only reliable manual, which is the word of God, whether the kind of life that you are leading now has an outcome that is in agreement with your desires. We have seen that it is possible for man to desire much and realise only very little. It is not the desire but the road we are walking on that counts.

Let us take an example.

If a young man desires to have an abundance of financial flow in his life, he needs to check his life whether his manner of walk is in keeping with the one that the word of God says will lead to the place of abundant prosperity. Is he honouring the Lord with his substance? The word of God tells us that so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine (Prov 3:10).

Is he a liberal soul? The scriptures say that the one that gives bountifully is the one who will receive bountifully. Is he a lazy man? Is he envying sinners or living in the fear of the Lord?

As another example; before I got married, I used to make my boast loudly in the Lord concerning marriage, that I can never marry the wrong woman. I proclaimed again and again that I shall marry the best wife possible for me to marry under heaven! See, I understood that it was not in me to determine this by myself and that all I could do was to walk on the way that leads to such an outcome concerning marriage. So I checked to see whether I was on this path or not. Here is how.

I discovered that the word of God has been expressed that *“do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight* (or direct your paths). (Prov 3:5-6). So I ensured that I did

not come up with my own ideas concerning what a wife should look like or what geographical area she should come from.

I also took care to ensure that as far as I could tell that my ways were pleasing to the Lord. The reason is because I discovered that you cannot by yourself escape from the bad woman but that the Bible has said that she is destined only for the one who is separated from the favour of God.

And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her. (Eccl 7:26)

For this reason I would pray often, and I still do, as the Psalmist,

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23-24)

With all these in place I knew that I was set to get the best wife I could possibly ever have. I could not by myself have done it; all I could do was place my feet on the path that led to that end.

CHAPTER 5

THE LORD TEACHES

Please notice that when charting my course for the desired end, my guide was the word of God, and the word of God only. As I have mentioned earlier, only God's word can teach you how to make the right choices. Every other choice making system is inherently faulty and will lead you to the place you do not desire. The Lord does teach us the way that we should choose.

Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. (Ps 25:12)

When you follow this instruction of the Lord, the consequence is that your soul will abide in prosperity, and your descendants will inherit the land (vs 13).

God teaches you to follow the way that will bring you profit; He teaches you to make the right choices in life because He wants you to have the best. He knows the danger spots, where to avoid, and where the blessings are hidden. All His instructions are to profit you. He does not have any personal gain from them; the only gain He has is to see that you turn out blessed. Elihu asked Job, "how does your righteousness profit God?" You are the one that stands to gain from obeying! Paul told Timothy, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (1 Tim 4:15 KJV)

Choices are like doors; the appearances thereof do not reveal what is behind. Only God can truly tell you what is behind it; learn to trust Him!

If you do not want to look for much and have it come to little, ask for the counsel of the Lord.

Listen to me again, what comes to you in this life is not a product of your desire primarily, but a product of the path you are walking on.

CHAPTER 6

WHOSE CRITERIA ARE THESE?

When making decisions, we have in our minds things that are guiding us. These are the criteria we use for the decision that we make. One thing you must do whenever you are making a choice is to ask yourself, "What criteria am I using? Whose ideas are these criteria? Mine, my friends, my culture or my God's?" These questions will save your life and your destiny.

In the issue of marriage, I have seen ladies disdain a man because of what he does not yet possess in material things. A lady I knew once walked into a man's home and remarked to her companion that "I cannot marry a man whose sitting room is as poor as this." No wonder she was always dissatisfied with her married life and appeared so bitter. God is saying to you ladies that the quality of a man is not affected by what he has or what he does not have. Life is definitely more than material things.

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. (Luke 12:15 KJV)

To choose a man based on what he has is most certainly not God's way; that is not His criterion.

Sometime ago I asked after a brother I had not seen in a long while, whether he had since gotten married. The person who I asked said no, so I asked why not. He told me that the brother was still seeking and gave me a report of the conversation he had with him on the matter especially concerning the kind of wife he was looking for. All I could say at the end was, "Is he now backslidden?"

I was shocked to learn of his criteria for choosing a wife; they all bothered on looks, complexion, ethnic origin and all such un-spiritual things. These are things that Paul categorically said a Christian must no longer look at. He said, "henceforth we know no man after the flesh, all we have come to realize is that if any person is in Christ, he or she is a new creature, born in Christ Jesus who has made all things new" (2 Cor 5:16,17). That was why I asked whether he was backslidden.

The question again is “Whose criteria are these?”

Listen to the Lord here.

“I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, Who leads you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand, And your offspring like its grains.” (Isa 48:17-19)

If only you will listen and use God's criteria alone to make choices, then good will come to you.

All the ideas of your friends and the society around you that you are pursuing after will not bring you good; it will not bring you happiness. All you will get is their temporary approval, which means nothing to your life. The people you are trying to please cannot bless you. I love to tell brethren that after they might have satisfied their tribal and village customs in the choice of a wife or husband, they should please remember to pray to the village and the tribe or the gods thereof for the blessings of good children, peace in the home and enduring marital joy. My reason is that the responsibility for blessing you falls upon the person you are serving; if you want blessings from God, then serve Him in all you do.

Again I say unto you that if you will listen to and use God's criteria alone to make choices, then good will come to you.

CHAPTER 7

THE FEW THAT ARE CHOSEN

You have heard it said that many are called but few are chosen. Have you ever wondered why it is only a few that are chosen and what the criteria are for choosing these few?

You see, God is not a respecter of persons. The Bible says that anyone, anywhere that works righteousness and does His will is acceptable unto Him. That means that the process of choosing is dependent on the people called and not primarily on the God who called them. After all, we have been told that it was Enoch that walked with God and not that God walked with Enoch. You are the one that determines how far God can go in your life.

The way by which God chooses people is by judging the choices they are making in life.

Listen my friend, it is possible to make God like you. We find it hard to realize that God does indeed have favourites; the truth is that He does not like everybody the same. He may love everyone, but He likes some people more than He likes others.

David was a man that the Lord liked, and there was a reason for it. He was described as a man after God's heart. This means that he had a personality that the Lord liked. You also can determine to be like David.

God wants to teach you how to make Him like you; how to make Him happy. He wants to show you things that you will do that will excite Him. He is not so much as interested in your spontaneity as He is in your obedience and willingness to learn. He is not as displeased with your lack of initiative as He is with your disobedience and your stubbornness. We all know that Solomon's choice of wisdom above riches pleased the Lord, but we need to realize that it was not a spontaneous decision but an act of obedience to the instructions that he had been given by his father David.

My father told me, "Take my words to heart...Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do! And whatever else you do, get good judgment. (Prov 4:4,7 NLT)

God gives you the options in life; He allows you the free will to make a choice, but He also tells you the best choice to make.

"... I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, (Deut 30:19)

The problem with people is that they think they are wiser than God. When God says "it will cost you your life", they say, "it is good to behold and to make one wise." Now, the Lord is always right and will be proved to be so in every case. Then they will look back and say, "how I have hated instruction and my heart spurned reproof! I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to my instructors!"

This is how the few are chosen: Those who choose what pleases God are always chosen by Him.

"To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me... I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off." (Isa 56:4-5)

You need to give attention to learning how to make the choices that will be pleasing to God.

One thing I used to tell my wife before we got married then was that whenever I make decisions, I ensure that I can defend such before God. If He were to come and say, "Bankie, why?" I ensure that He will have nothing like "but I told you this" or "I told you that" to say to me. I try to ensure that all the light that the Lord has given me by way of understanding and the knowledge of His word are satisfied in those decisions. This way, I do not remain just called, I become chosen.

God is not impulsive; He has ways and patterns by which He does things. He does not choose people by throwing dice; He has reasons every time.

Let us see the case of Saul and David to illustrate.

Saul was rejected because of his repeated disobedience to the instructions of the Lord. You remember, for example, the time that he was commanded to go and completely destroy Amalek. He preferred to spare the king and some of the goods from the land. Despite this, he was still arguing with the prophet, Samuel. Such an attitude was the reason for his rejection.

Now, David was chosen as the replacement. The reason?

After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22)

David was chosen because of his demonstrated obedience to the will of God. Saul was called but when it came to the point of choosing the king whose kingdom will endure, who will have God's covenant with his house forever, he was rejected. He was rejected because he feared the people more than he feared God. His excuse before Samuel for disobeying God was always the people.

"Because I saw that the people were scattering from me..." (1 Sam 13:11)

"But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal." (1 Sam 15:21)

The respect and the favour of the people were more important to him than the favour of God which is gotten by obedience to His word. In the time of crisis, he chose to please the people rather than God. Many of us are still like that today; we will rather fulfil the customs of our people than obey the word of God. We wish to please them in marriage, in the way we run our homes, the way we spend our money and our time, and many other ways. This is the spirit of Saul that leads to the Lord's rejection.

Who are you trying to please? Those same people will yet come to seek your favour if you will just settle down to please God. You do not need the favour of men. Seek the favour of God and you will automatically have the favour of men as will be needed.

Seek to please God. When Saul sought to please men he lost everything. Samuel told him that,

"...for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure." (1 Sam 13:13-14)

One of my pastors used to say that it is the decisions that you make for God in the furnace of affliction that will decide whether you will remain just called or will become chosen.

This is how God chooses people: He puts all that He has called through trials; those trials reveal what is in their hearts. He rejects everyone that places more value on the favour of men than obedience to the word of God and who will rather have the immediate gratification of their desires.

How was Moses chosen?

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Heb 11:24-26)

Moses was chosen because of the choice he made for God.

There is something I want you to notice in the first line of the verses above, and this is that Moses made his decision when he had grown up. You see, before he grew up, other people made the decisions for him and he was overwhelmed by the influence of his surroundings.

CHAPTER 8

TIME FOR YOUR DECISION

I mentioned that it was when Moses had grown up that he made his decision and that when he was young, other people made the decisions for him and he was greatly influenced by the surroundings. Now, this is true for everybody.

When you are young, what you do is largely as a result of the choices made by your parents and your ancestors together with the overwhelming influence of the society. It is a fact that we all, as children, have no choice but to conform to the influence of those things that are about us. We conform to the teachings and examples, and the lack of proper ones too, set before us by our parents and caregivers. If you were born a Muslim, you will probably grow up a Muslim. If were born into a surrounding strong in fornication in which everyone is expected even by their parents to have boyfriends and girlfriends, you cannot hold on to virginity for long. You will most likely start having sex in your early teen ages. Most of the young girls that get pregnant and have abortions are only expressing the character of their society and homes; it is not their fault.

It is important we understand this principle. It was the reason why Jesus apparently overturned the law of Moses when they brought to Him the woman that was caught in adultery. He did this not primarily because of mercy but because of superior understanding of spiritual laws and principles. His real reason can be discerned from the statement He used to set her free.

But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)

See, the Lord of the Law expected that the whole nation would be a holy nation so that the influence of evil from the community and the families would not exist. If this situation subsisted, then an adulterer would be one by choice and would have no excuse; such a person would therefore be nothing but a seed of evil in the land and would have to be removed by a capital punishment.

Now, at the time of Jesus' ministry, the situation was far from this ideal and many were adulteresses because of the evil influence in the environment; they therefore were clearly not worthy of death. With the right influence, they might repent. He proved His point by daring anyone who had no such sin of adultery in his life to stone her, and none did. He gave her a new beginning. This principle, again, is why the Lord, at a point in the history of Israel, refused to punish some fornicators who were children.

Therefore your daughters play the harlot and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot or your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; so the people without understanding are ruined. (Hos 4:13-14)

The same reason is why He refused to condemn the children of Israel who were less than 20 years of age when they tempted Him in the wilderness. It was assumed that those below that age of twenty really did not know what they were doing but were only echoing the disobedient voices of the elders.

I hope you have understood this.

Now, the more important thing to know is that the Lord brings everyone to the point where they will each take the responsibility for their own lives. He gives everyone a chance to change. "It is time to make your decision" He says; "I can make all things new for you."

From that point on, you will be responsible for the decisions you take. For that woman caught in adultery, that was her day of visitation. After that day, should she continue in adultery, she would be an adulteress by choice.

Now, this is where most people blow it. Many will rather continue in the passing pleasures of sin. The time of ignorance that the Lord overlooked has passed; it is now time to repent. But so many will not come out.

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light... (John 3:19)

Moses, when he had grown up was faced with his own crisis point. He made his decision and the Lord demonstrated that it was the righteous decision.

The time has come for you to stop blaming your parents, your childhood or your environment. He is asking you to make your choice now; He wants to make all things new for you.

He will make that body damaged with abuse, sex and abortions new! He can make the doctor who said you can no longer have children a liar.

He can make your finances new. He can make your future bright.

You must first decide to forsake your past and stop identifying yourself by what you used to be. If you forsake the past and hold on to God, all your sins and the effects they have had or would have had on you will be erased by the powerful washing blood of the Lord Jesus. You will understand that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

If you choose rather to not repent but to hold on to your former ways for whatever reason, then all the iniquities of your past, your parents and the society that influenced you will be brought to be on your head.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants. (Deut 30:19)

CHAPTER 9

TEMPORAL LIGHT AFFLICTIONS

There is one more thing I will like us to notice from the account of Moses.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Now, notice that his choice was not at a time of affliction but at a time of prosperity. The point is that there are two kinds of tests that the Lord passes us through. There is the test of affliction and there is the test of prosperity.

We are often tested by afflictions, but the test of prosperity is just as important. God is looking for those whose heart will still remain His even when they are in abundance. It is much easier to pant after God when you are poor and deprived; but it takes a real person to remain focused on the Lord when there is abundance. The danger of forgetting the Lord in the time of abundance is so real that the Lord constantly reminded the Israelites who left Egypt and their descendants to guard against it. He gave them many ordinances to help them to constantly remember.

But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Deut 8:18)

Many forget the Lord in the time of prosperity; they make choices that show that they have denied the One who gave them their wealth. Men and women who fail the test of prosperity cannot have enduring wealth. Such was the case of Uzziah, a man that the Lord helped to become a mighty king. When he forgot the Lord, he became a leper and died in isolation.

But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. (2 Chron 26:16)

The test of prosperity is to find out what you will choose when there is a risk of losing your wealth or your favour with men.

Sometimes, the decisions that we make for God and for righteousness lead to a temporary light affliction, but remember that the affliction cannot be compared with the glory that will follow it. Whatever difficulty that may be brought your way will be temporary; the trial was only designed to separate the men from the boys. Real men will not hold on to comfort if it is at the risk of losing the favour of God. Moses departed from the place of comfort to be in the place of the will of God.

Whatever obedience to God costs you is a seed; it will come back to you multiplied. In reality, obedience to God does not cost, it pays. Everything you lose for the sake of truth and obedience to God is a seed; it will come back to you multiplied.

We must learn to focus on the end of every matter - the eventual outcome. We must learn to look beyond immediate gratification.

CHAPTER 10

TWO DANGEROUS DEVILS

In closing this exposition, I will like to show us two things that compete with the Lord for the heart of His people. They are the things that men lust after that steal their hearts from doing the will of God and cause them to choose the things that are not pleasing to Him.

THE LUST OF MEN

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? (John 5:44)

There are two wills contesting against each other in your life: the will of God and the will of men.

Men have their expectations of you. Your father, your mother, your friends and the society as a whole all have their expectations. There is a way they want you to dress, to walk and to talk. There is a job they will love for you to have, a kind of man or woman they will want you to marry. There is a way they will like you to conduct your home and there is even the number of children they will want you to have. They have different expectations of you; if you do those things, they will be pleased with you and accept you.

God, however, has His own expectations also. The question is whose expectations you will follow.

Many of the children of God miss it here; they are more concerned about what people think of them than they are about conforming to the standards of the word of God. They follow the lust of men. As we saw earlier, that was the doom of King Saul. My friends, as children of God in this age, the time for doing the will of the people like Saul did has ended, as it is written,

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles... (1 Peter 4:3)

“What will my friends say?” This was the question a business executive asked R. W. Shambach when he confronted him with the choice of accepting Jesus as

Lord over his life. He rejected Him and died that same night. His doom? What his friends would say.

The Lord Jesus said that you cannot obey God as long as your concern is what men think of you. In His own life he stated, "I do not receive glory from men." (John 5:41). That is, "I do not get my approval from men; I do not care what they think. My purpose is to be pleasing to God."

All your friends are now married does not mean that you will now throw all godly caution to the wind to get a husband. Many believers still spend money in such a manner as to display that they are doing well and prospering. They buy cars they do not need and wear clothes they can hardly afford, all in a bid to give an impression. They are concerned about their image. My friend, if you are doing well, you are doing well; if you are not, you are not. What people think will not change the fact.

The main thing is whether you have real substance in your life — in your inner man. The Lord Jesus has said that a man's life is not determined by the abundance of the things that are his material possessions. If this is the truth, then do not judge people by what they have as material possessions and do not allow yourself to be so judged.

I remember as a single man with very little material possessions, how I used to walk tall with a heart that was exalted in God. I used to tell the ladies that were my friends that I knew I was full of God, and that the Lord and I had some agreements. I declared boldly that no man could intimidate me by reason of what he has; I was too sure of what I had and made no apologies. I used to feel sorry for anyone who either tried to look down on me or feel sorry for me. I was a man that had real substance, and I still am.

The lusts of men! This is what kills a lot of believers. They know the plan of God for their lives deep inside their hearts but the desire to 'do well' and meet up to the standard of their mates keeps them trying to earn money in a place where they really do not belong. Satan has bought their destiny with it. When the Lord called Abram, He called Him alone and was not trying to measure him up with his mates (Is 51).

Men are about the greatest hindrance to the fulfilment of God's plan in many lives. It is men that the Lord warns not to put asunder what God had joined together.

Hear the command of the Lord!

Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed? (Isa 2:22)

You don't need to 'belong' with men. There is no need for their thinking highly of you. What men think of you will not get you anywhere as a child of God. If you 'belong' with God, you will become great, just as the Scriptures have testified:

So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God. (2 Chron 27:6)

If God blesses you, you are blessed. When He does, those same people that you are concerned about pleasing now will be seeking to be pleasing to you. On the natural plane, you see many 'illustrious' sons being honoured by their communities. Many of these sons of illustration were nobodies; but when they became millionaires and federal ministers, they suddenly became illustrious. If they had stayed where everyone wanted them, they would never have illustrated anything.

Friends, if you will walk with God, He will by Himself bring the men that you need into your life. Let God be first. Don't spend God's money trying to compete with anyone. Some of the people you are competing with are riding on horses already but they don't brag about it; you are still walking on foot. You will wear yourself out. Do not spend your energy on that which does not satisfy.

Obeying God will most certainly cause you to disappoint the people that you love and those who you love you many times. It may hurt your father or your mother. Remember that Jesus said,

"If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-27 NLT)

My beloved, to please the Lord by making the right choices oftentimes hurt people but this is the price of discipleship. Remember that it is the lusts of men versus the will of God.

CHAPTER 11

THE GOD CALLED MAMMON

And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Mark 4:18-19)

In the last chapter we saw the first of the two dangerous devils that separate people from choosing what pleases God, and we called it the lust of men. The second one is what we are seeing in this chapter.

There are two masters contesting for lordship over every believer's life: God and Mammon. The Lord Jesus has said to us that it is only possible to love one of them. He said that no servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

To love here is more than an emotional feeling; it relates to devotion and is reflected in how you make decisions.

Mammon refers to the cares of this world and the deceitful riches that are therein. It is a major cause of confusion in the choice making process of believers. If you can overcome it, you have it made already.

A brother walked up to me a few years ago and told me that he was desirous of specializing in a particular field of medicine but how much money to be made there is a problem. I immediately went on to explain to him that once the consideration of money is first on the list of points in making a decision, the Lord automatically takes the last seat. The reason is because, as Jesus has said, you can only love one at a time, either the Lord or money.

See, the love of money does not mean you take an image of the Naira or Dollar and start to kiss it. No! It also does not mean that you wake up in the morning declaring, "Oh money, I love you so". No. Absolutely not! Edwin Cole said that "practical atheism is not raising a fist and saying there is no God but living as if there is none." In the same manner, the love of money is shown by your considerations for it when you have to make choices in life.

As an example, a man proposes marriage to a woman, and her first consideration is how much material possessions and cash are his. She is more concerned about his financial status. That is what is called holding on to mammon. It is not possible for her to discern the will of God on the issue. She is making herself a cheap prey for the bait of the devil.

Another example, which I alluded to in relating an encounter earlier, is in the choice of career or business. I have found out that about the most important thing to most of us is how much money there is to acquire. Very few remember that purpose, or calling and ministry, is the most important thing to consider first.

Recently, my wife and I had a discussion with some people, and there were so many ideas flying on how to quickly make money in business. The discussion was so sweet that one could almost get carried away. I told my wife afterwards that we must never forget in all that we do that money making is not first but ministry. When I say 'ministry' I do not mean preaching the word of God, but I refer to the impact that whatever we are doing to make money is having on those we are serving and on our community in general. That is the godly way to see a career and business. Thinking first about how much money is to be made and how much security a field holds for the future is idolatry.

Please bear in mind that I am not just talking about what you might term as covetousness; that is in itself a big problem. Covetousness implies wanting 'everything,' but mammon is quite subtle and it refers to what is called 'the cares (or worries) of this world'. The cares of this world refer to the very legitimate things such as what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and from where we shall be clothed.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you shall eat or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?” (Matt 6:24-25)

In the first verse above, Jesus talked about mammon, and in the next verse he said, “for this reason I say to you.” What He was saying in effect is that

worrying about those apparently legitimate things of this life amounts to the service of mammon.

This service of mammon is everywhere; the whole world lives in it. In fact, it is okay for them to be concerned, they not having the same heavenly father's concern. You can understand that a man of faith will indeed appear stupid and unrealistic to the person who is pursuing the concerns of life. However, this is the divine counsel upon which the faith is based.

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith! Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

I pray that you will grasp this truth; most people haven't. So, they change jobs, choose marriage partners and change geographical locations because of 'security.' Hear me, Saint of God; your security is not Lagos, London, or in Los Angeles; your security is in being planted in the will of God.

Friends, there will definitely be reasons to be afraid, but there is a greater reason to have confidence; to look up with boldness in the face of situations; to see all and yet say, "my salvation is near". That reason is that your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

You have a heavenly Father who is actively planning and taking charge of your life to bring you to that good place that only He can create for you. Nothing can invalidate the word of God. He has said, they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing (Ps 34:10). Seeking God is a choice that you must make. David made that choice and said to the Lord, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly" (Ps 63:1.)

God is better at planning your security than you are. All the plans that you have for your security are things that can be seen; things like good jobs, savings, stocks, bonds and landed property. They are described by the word of

God as temporal, and of the flesh. They can wither, they can fail you when you need them most; they are not strong enough to carry the weight of your hope.

Whatever God builds for you can never fail you. When God plants you, you are planted and secure. You will be at rest. You have no need to fear, for the Lord can prepare a table in the midst of scarcity; He can cause rain to fall in the midst of a dry season. He will not let you be disappointed.

And you will know that I am the LORD; Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame. (Isa 49:23)

CHAPTER 12

BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS

Covetousness is the result of the deceitfulness of riches. From the parable of the sower that the Lord Jesus told, He distinguished this from the cares of the world. We do not need to say much about this; all we need to do is to warn those believers who have made wealth their goal in life. God's word will not fail, and He has said some things about the quest for wealth.

A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him. (Prov 28:22)

The King James' version puts it this way,

He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. (Prov 28:22 KJV)

Running after wealth for a child of God is nothing but a magnetic attraction for poverty. Please be careful. True riches that endure come only as a reward that God gives you for your faithfulness.

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. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (or sorrows). (1 Tim 6:9-10)

In case you do not yet know what is meant by many sorrow, or many griefs, I'll like you to know that it means sicknesses, heartaches, stomach ulcers, mental problems, marital disharmony, disobedient children etc. Do not put yourself on the line for these.

CHAPTER 13

LET'S SUMMARIZE

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Kingdom-Word Ministries

Kingdom-Word Ministries is a non-denominational teaching ministry based in Enugu, Nigeria. Activities of the ministry include weekly Bible classes at the ministry studio-hall, publication of free teaching tracts, magazines and books, radio/TV broadcasts and organizing teaching seminars in various towns and cities.

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