

**EASTWOOD
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**BUILDING A
SOLID
CHURCH**



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by

EASTWOOD ANABA

Building a Solid Church

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A "solid church" can be defined as an impregnable and closely-knit body of believers in which every part is adequately catered for and empowered to function efficiently. There are many dysfunctional churches around with members sitting idly on Sunday mornings. The five-fold ministry should equip the saints for the work of the ministry and edify the Body of Christ, so that it can grow into the stature of the fullness of Christ.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:18-19

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I NTRODUCTION

Building local churches and denominations with many branches is a common feature of the Body of Christ today. The explosion in church growth has taken the world by surprise. Now many of the churches are making great impact and transforming lives. The challenge with this Kingdom initiative is establishing churches that bear fruit and outlive their founders. Where will most of these churches be in the next one hundred years if Jesus Christ tarries? The weakness in the churches we see around us is the overemphasis placed upon the charisma, persona and direction of their leaders. Churches over depend on their founders, general overseers and pastors for growth and influence. A church should not be built to serve the personal interest of the pastor and a few of his or her leaders. It is God's house and must be built His way and to His glory.

It is a divine privilege for God to call a person to build a church. The good thing about this honour is, God grants the grace to perform this task with His wisdom and power. We cannot use our own wisdom and strength to build God's Church. The Psalmist said it is the LORD that builds a house and not man's efforts.

1 Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

Psalm 127:1-2

The LORD assured Zerubbabel, the governor, that his hands had laid the foundation of the Temple he was building and he would finish it. He was the head of the tribe of Judah at the time of return from Babylonian captivity in Cyrus' first year. He was called "the prince of the captivity." This administrator faced great opposition from his detractors in his effort to rebuild the Temple and God gave him assurance that he would finish the assignment.

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

Zechariah 4:6-10

The Temple was not built by human might or power. The word “might” is the Hebrew word **ḥayil** which means valour, army and great forces, and “power” is **kōah** which means strength, substance and wealth. The Temple was not built by military might or financial capacity but by the Spirit of God. The power and might of enemies both local and foreign could not stop the Temple from being built. The Spirit of the LORD overcame every opposition.

The Church is opposed in every possible way. Dangerous people in the community do everything they can to destroy it. Mountains stand in its way and a lack of resources could threaten its existence. Small beginnings may be discouraging but God strengthens the spirit of the builders of the Church to prevail. Recently, the pastor and members of one of the Fountain Gate Chapel branches were ordered by the chief of their village not to wear clothing during a festival season. They were to walk about half naked like other people did in the village. The church refused to conform to the irrational demands of tradition and was heavily persecuted.

Jesus Christ was emphatic in His declaration to the apostles that He would build His Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. He has since built a solid Church and the assault of hell against it all these years has not brought it down. Some statistics show that in the two thousand years of the Church Age, approximately seventy million faithful Christians have lost their lives because of their faith in Jesus. Sixty five per cent of these martyrs died within the last one hundred years. In spite of these attacks the Church is as solid as Jesus promised it would be.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:18-19

A “solid church” can be defined as an impregnable and closely-knit body of believers in which every part is adequately catered for and empowered to function efficiently. There are many dysfunctional churches around with members sitting idly on Sunday mornings. The five-fold ministry should equip the saints for the work of the ministry and edify the Body of Christ, so that it can grow into the stature of the fullness of Christ.

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

A summary of some of the things I have noted above, gives us a good explanation to our definition of a SOLID CHURCH:

A solid church is an impregnable church that is established on the foundation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Ghost, which is built by the Word of God into a body that functions efficiently, bears fruit and possesses the ability to overcome the attacks of the gates of hell.

God empowers the people He calls to build churches, to build solid ones. They are wise master builders who build churches that last. Jesus Christ made it abundantly clear that a house that is built on the rock stands whereas one that is built on the sand falls.

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24-27

Churches are springing up everywhere around the world. Some of the pastors who raise these churches are young and others have no formal education or Bible based training. Naturally, human limitations and imperfections are obvious in these churches, no matter how faithful or trained the pastors may be. It is imperative for us to prayerfully apply ourselves to the Word of God and wise counsel to build strong churches.

Disturbing signs in contemporary times show that many churches don't last. They go out of existence after a few years or even months. Divisions destroy some of the churches. Others are starved to death by the lack of resources to sustain them. Demonic attacks shut the doors of churches that are not combat ready. There are unfortunate situations in which the founders of some churches die and the churches disappear with them. Volatile churches are common in an unstable world.

It is sad that in some parts of the world we don't have the statistics to show the changes that are taking place in the Church. Some statistics in America give us a hint about what is happening there. It is projected that in 2050, the percentage of the United States population in church attendance will be almost half of what it was in 1990. Churches that are between 40 to 190 years old declined in attendance from 2003 to 2004. In 1990, 20.4% of Americans attended an Orthodox denominational church on a Sunday. In 2000, the percentage dropped to 18.7% and by 2004 to 17.7%. These percentages in decline are not easily noticeable because we forget that the overall population of any nation grows. Our churches may therefore look large in numbers but in actual fact the percentage declines indicate backward trends.

Solid churches sustain their growth and the impact they make on society. I strongly believe that one of the reasons for the decline in church growth is the

inability of the church to intervene in the numerous problems that bedevil humankind. People go where efforts are made to meet their needs. God has positioned the Church on earth to do just that.

In the effort to build a strong church, you must determine its purpose. Why do people establish churches? I know in many instances pastors claim to do so to the glory of God and to win souls for Christ. A critical examination of these claims however, exposes other motives for forming churches that have nothing to do with the glory of God and the wellbeing of souls. Personal interest and competition are the driving forces behind many church initiatives. Church splits are the result of associate pastors who want their own ministries and senior pastors who insist that they own their churches.

A senior pastor lamented to me some time ago that the associate pastors in his church were not faithful and some of them had left the church. I explained to him that if he continues to see the church as his and not his and theirs, they will continue leaving. People want a sense of ownership in what they do and to deny them that feeling indefinitely breeds discontentment in them. You should get to the place in ministry as the founder and leader of a ministry where you stop calling it “my ministry” and say “our ministry.”

In the first chapter of this book, we shall look at the purpose for establishing a church. Every believer is conversant with the general reasons for church planting such as winning souls for Christ and demonstrating the power of God. We must however, capture the purpose of building churches in a language unbelievers can appreciate. We should convince them that apart from sending people to heaven and giving them spiritual life, the Church has answers to the problems that confront people on earth. The world shuns the Church because it thinks we are detached from reality. We look on while the world around us is collapsing and people are perishing.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PEOPLE-FOCUSED CHURCH

Building people-focused ministries that prioritise the interest of worshippers and their wellbeing is an effective way of establishing viable and strong churches. The secular world is streets ahead of the Church in seeking the wellbeing of the world's populace. Institutions, businesses, organisations and international bodies channel their resources and energies towards alleviating the sufferings of humanity and improving the world.

Jesus Christ compared the proactive nature of the world with the indifferent attitude of the Church by saying the former was wiser than the latter. The world does not defer peace, joy, comfort and sound health to the life hereafter. The Church on the other hand, absolves itself from responsibility by insisting that humanitarian assistance to people is a worldly activity.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Luke 16:7-8

One of the major attempts of the secular world to tackle the needs of human beings is the adoption of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are eight international development goals that were adopted after the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000. All one hundred and ninety three United Nations member states and about twenty-three international organisations agreed to achieve these goals by the year 2015. The MDGs are to:

1. ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER.

Poverty is a major problem in the world. Fifteen million people die of starvation every year and six million of these are children. Instead of the vague teaching on prosperity, the Church must find practical ways of dealing with poverty in the church and the society as a whole. It is not enough to say heaven is the home of believers – life on earth must be fulfilling.

Isaiah challenged the people of Israel to incorporate assistance to the poor and needy in their religious practices like fasting and prayer. While we pray for

divine intervention, we must execute human intervention.

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Isaiah 58:6-7

Giving food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless and clothing the naked is part of pure religion. It is sad that in many churches even the poor among them are neglected. One day, I heard a pastor say his church was not a hospital or welfare organisation. He therefore directed the people to secular organisations where they could receive help. Such a position cannot be godly.

It is urgent to state that apart from the physical famine the world is facing, there is an unprecedented famine in hearing the Word of God. Believers and unbelievers alike don't want the word of truth that is able to save their souls and keep them holy. They run about looking for some forms of preaching that promise them prosperity and miracles. Preachers with a seared conscience take advantage of weak Christians and dish out spiritually toxic teachings to their victims. The prophet Amos prophesied about the Word famine of the last days.

11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.

Amos 8:11-12

The Body of Christ should go back to the emphasis on the Word of God. Believers must study the Scriptures for themselves. This is the way to build solid churches. The eroding of personal commitment to the Word of God is the cause of the weak churches in many parts of the world. Believers move from one "man of God" to another in search of miracles and breakthroughs. Many of them end up as the victims of dubious individuals who claim to have an anointing. The unadulterated Word of God is the only means by which the soul of a man is anchored.

2. PROVIDE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION.

Most churches exist in places with high illiteracy rates and yet they are not involved in educational efforts. Some churches even see education as a worldly thing they should not concern themselves with. A pastor remarked that Jesus did not build schools and therefore it is wrong for a church to do so. Churches that are people-focused have education as a major agenda.

The prophet Jeremiah promised the people of Israel that God would bring them back to Zion and give them pastors to feed them with knowledge and understanding.

14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:

15 And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:14-15

It is not right to limit knowledge and understanding to just spiritual things. Knowledge is all encompassing and God wants believers to have knowledge in everything including science. The Spirit of God in Daniel and his friends instructed them in secular knowledge. The Church must be involved with the effort to eradicate illiteracy from the world.

Illiteracy must be eradicated even in the Church. Ignorance is not a mark of spirituality. In times past, church folks thought secular knowledge was a disincentive to spiritual life. They actually considered people who were educated to be worldly and prideful. Jesus Christ proved with His life that education was essential to the Kingdom of God by growing in wisdom. He was so learned that He could argue with doctors and lawyers of the law at the age of twelve.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Luke 2:46-47

The people who heard Jesus were surprised at His understanding and the answers He gave. Believers should not take pride in ignorance. We should seek

knowledge in secular things and exceed the unbelievers in the understanding of science, mathematics, economics and other fields. Daniel is one of the most spiritual people in the Bible but he was learned in science.

3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Daniel 1:3-4, 17-21

Knowledge is a powerful tool in extending God's Kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel. The world listens to us when we are knowledgeable. Knowledge helps us to understand the Bible better. In other words, ignorance has a negative effect on our spiritual lives. Many churches around the world have included the provision of quality secular education in their vision. They build great institutions of learning that compete with any standards in the world.

3. PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN.

While the world seeks gender equality, a large portion of the Church misuses the Bible to marginalise women and discriminate against them. We need a revolutionary reshaping of the mind concerning what the Bible says about

women. The Bible does not dishonour women but the traditions of men try to subject them to inhumane treatment. There is neither male nor female in Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:28-29

The apostle Peter admonished men to dwell with their wives according to knowledge because they were weaker vessels. He also pointed out that women were joint heirs together of the grace of life.

7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

1 Peter 3:7

Believers have to take the lead in emancipating women from the tyranny of male domination. Male believers have the revelation of the glory God has bestowed on women and they should champion the cause of giving them what they deserve. Domestic violence must end in the Church and society. Women should receive equal remuneration and respect for work done.

4. REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY RATES.

No group of people should have more compassion for children than the Church. Children are vulnerable and at risk everywhere but the Church turns a blind eye to their challenges. It is sad to note that believers are so worldly that they attend to only things and people that give them immediate satisfaction and gain. Children don't matter to churches that want numbers to improve their membership statistics and wealth to enhance their self-aggrandisement.

25 And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.

26 There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil.

Exodus 23:25-26

God promises to ensure that women who serve Him don't miscarry their children. He also promises that they will not be barren. Another promise

completes this loop of promises – God says He will fulfil the number of our days. This last of the promises means children will not die before their time. God has the answer to child mortality. The secret to living our full life span is serving the Lord.

5. PROMOTE MATERNAL HEALTH.

The Bible teaches that God promises to take care of women during pregnancy and child delivery. The Church must prayerfully put in place programmes and structures that offer protection and care to women. The house of God is a place of refuge to vulnerable people.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

1 Timothy 2:14-15

God is concerned about women being safe in childbearing. The period of gestation to delivery is one of the most precarious times in a woman's life. In our local church in Bolgatanga, constant prayer sessions are held for pregnant women until they have their babies. We also give serious attention to educating them on maternal health care issues.

Believers should be reminded that poor maternal health affects us too. In spite of Jacob's covenant with God, his wife Rachel died during the birth of Benjamin. The midwife could not save her.

16 And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour.

17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.

18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

20 And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.

Genesis 35:16-20

If Jacob's wife died during childbirth, it means child delivery is a real danger to women. Believers must join in the effort to reduce and possibly eliminate this risk. Through prayer and scientific knowledge we are the best people on earth to save women during childbirth.

The Hebrew women during the time of Moses' birth were supernaturally empowered to deliver their children before Pharaoh could destroy them.

15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah:

16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty.

21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

Exodus 1:15-21

My mother told me she nearly lost her life at my delivery. I was too big to come out and the untrained midwives did not have the skills to bring me out. My mother's life was at risk and I could have died too. You can imagine the number of lives we will save in the world through the promotion of maternal health.

6. FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS, MALARIA, AND OTHER DISEASES.

The Church has the supernatural power to heal diseases in the name of Jesus. This power should be employed to heal the sick. Some believers are trained medical doctors with the ability to cure diseases. Such believers should work hard to perform at the highest level. They have the supernatural and scientific power to heal the so-called incurable diseases of the world. Believers should join the rest of the world in the use of modern, scientific and social methods to

combat disease.

God is preoccupied with ensuring that His people are not destroyed by disease. He excludes them from the diseases that are threatening to destroy the world.

25 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them,

26 And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

Exodus 15:25-26

The Body of Christ must join in the war against disease. The general conditions of hygiene in the world call for our attention. Research is on going to find the cure to many diseases. The Church, which is the light of the world, cannot remain unconcerned while the world struggles to find the solutions.

7. ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY.

The international community is engaged in a fight to rescue the earth from destruction. Tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, deforestation, fire outbreaks, the depletion of the ozone layer and a host of other challenges are threatening the existence of the earth. The Church has the supernatural power and creative wisdom to join the rest of the world in the fight to save the earth. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If the world degenerates, it is because we have lost our flavour. We cannot be effective in spreading the Gospel in a chaotic world.

Through prayer Elijah stopped rain from falling and prayed it down after three and a half years. The prophet interfered with the course of nature. Believers can similarly influence the events of nature on earth.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

James 5:16-19

If the Body of Christ had “Elijahs” to bring rain down and “Joshuas” to stop the sun, the world would have won the war against forces of deterioration on the planet. The power to silence the storm, which Jesus Christ exercised on earth is resident in believers. We need the boldness and faith to release that power to control the trend of affairs in the world.

8. DEVELOP GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT.

While the world is becoming one big global family, churches constantly experience splits and confusion. The world unites to fight against the common problems humanity faces. Americans, Asians, Africans and Europeans put aside their differences to tackle disease, poverty and environmental degradation. It is sad that most Christian denominations find it difficult to operate as one unit. Personal interests and ambitions are in the fore as we build weak and emaciated churches. Leaders fail to place the wellbeing of church members above their egocentric pursuits – people are not their focus. The Church should be able to forge a useful partnership with the non-Christian world to deal with the problems that face humanity.

Jesus Christ commissioned the Church to preach the Gospel to all nations and not a few. Many ministries have limited visions. They just reach out to those within their vicinity. We must reach the unreached people around the world and one of the best ways to do this is for ministries to co-operate with one another.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20

Aimless fellowship among believers must stop. We must redeem the time because we are in the last days. The world demonstrates the need for a global partnership by spending huge sums of money and endless amounts of time on

conferences and other activities with the aim of collaborating with one another to fight their common problems.

The foregoing study on the MDGs is convincing enough to wake the Church up. The world must not leave us out of rescuing humanity from destruction. We should not lag behind in the fight against the negative forces that seek to drown humankind. A solid church is empowered and equipped to transform the world. While we take care of people's spiritual needs, we should at the same time commit ourselves to their physical wellbeing.

Jesus Christ directed His ministry towards glorifying the Father, saving souls and meeting human needs. He addressed the issues the MDGs are trying to solve. He did not discriminate against women. The Saviour invited children to come to Him and laid His hands on them. He healed the sick and raised the dead. The Great Teacher detested ignorance and waged a relentless warfare against it by teaching in synagogues, homes, streets and the desert – He was interested in education. Jesus Christ demonstrated His interest in the environment by commanding storms to cease. As a result of the interest He took in people, His following grew in size and strength. He refused to be influenced by the diversionary tactics of the religious leaders of His day who were engrossed in vague traditional practices that had nothing to do with the people's conditions of living.

The teachings of the Lord Jesus emphasised the need for the Church to be people-focused. Human needs should attract the attention of churches. Food, water and shelter must find their way into our practices and teachings. People's spiritual needs come first but their physical needs should not be neglected.

The story of the Good Samaritan remains one of the most popular stories Jesus Christ told in His earthly life. He stated clearly that our willingness to touch people where they hurt most is more important than our religious pretences. The priest and the Levite were religious but lacked compassion towards the wounded man. Our Lord drove a strong point home that physical and practical assistance to people is an integral part of the practice of godliness.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Luke 10:29-37

The series of activities the Good Samaritan undertook to help the wounded man did not include the things we normally regard as spiritual activities. He did not quote the Scriptures at the man as he lay on the ground bleeding. The Good Samaritan did not pray for him in other tongues. He did not call angels to come to his assistance. He provided medication, transportation, care and financial support. This attitude should govern what we do for one another in church and how we touch the world. It is simply not enough to do only the things we consider spiritual and ignore the acts of mercy and love.

Jesus Christ chastised the Pharisees for paying tithes while neglecting the weightier matters of the Law.

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Matthew 23:23

The Judge of humankind called religion without justice, mercy and faithfulness hypocrisy. Our attitude towards human needs will form the basis for

our judgment on the last day. Believers who respond to the needs of the world will be rewarded, whereas those who turn away from a dying world will be judged for their insensitivity.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:34-40

The reason for the Church is the people. If churches focus on the people according to God's plan and to His glory, they would be strong. A solid church is a viable, growing, healthy and impact- making one, where the members are spiritually, mentally and physically empowered to execute their mandate on earth.

The ability of a church to care for people depends on the shepherd's heart. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the Church who cares for His flock. He loved the Church and gave His life for it. Strong churches will emerge if Pastors and church leaders concentrate on the needs of the people instead of activities that lead to division and weaken them. In the next chapter, we will look at the pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ. His declaration that He would build His Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it was based on His ministry as the Great Shepherd.

CH APTER TWO

THE GREAT SHEPHERD

The apostle Peter referred to Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd. The pastors of churches are accountable to Him both in this life and the next, for the way in which the flock is cared for. In the light of this, pastors have to live according to the godly standard expected of them and also do the work of the ministry according to the pattern Jesus Christ has set.

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

1 Peter 5:2-4

The designation “chief shepherd” in the above Scripture reference is the Greek word ***archipoimēn*** meaning head or chief shepherd. He leads in providing pastoral ministry to the flock. He is the unseen Shepherd of every church. The Chief Shepherd will judge the human shepherds on the Day of Judgment. As the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ sets the example for human shepherds to follow. This means there is a set pattern for pastoral ministry, which we must follow. Building a ministry according to divine plan is comparable to how God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle according to the pattern He showed him.

9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

Exodus 25:9

The writer of Hebrews referred to Jesus Christ as the Great Shepherd.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,”

Hebrews 13:20

One of the names of Jesus is JEHOVAH-ROHI – the Lord our shepherd.

There is a connection between this word and the word, pastor. The word “pastor”, in the New Testament is the Greek word **poimen** , which means a shepherd. The pastor is the **poimen** and Jesus Christ is the **archipoimēn** . A church can only be as solid as its pastor is. The book of Psalms presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the shepherd who makes His sheep lie down in green pastures and leads them beside still waters.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23:1-6

The quality of the shepherd determines the state of his flock. The Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, provides us with the qualities a pastor should possess and the ministry He offers His flock. The state of Jesus' flock can be seen in Psalm twenty-three. Taking this Psalm phrase by phrase, gives us wonderful insights into Jesus' ministry as Jehovah-Rohi.

1. “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.”

“The LORD is **MY SHEPHERD** .” This is possessive and emphatic. The flock is not in doubt about who their shepherd is. They “own” the Shepherd and He “owns” them. The shepherd belongs to the flock and the flock belong to him or her. They depend on the pastor for most of their spiritual and emotional needs. They don't have to fall on strange pastors for sustenance. The commitment of their pastor to them is expected to be one hundred per cent. They don't have to go elsewhere for pastoral counselling or assistance. Their pastor is everything to them. His ministry is complete and comprehensive. It is not wrong for church members to visit other churches or go to pastors outside their local churches for support and assistance. The advice I give in such situations is that they should do so on the recommendation of their pastor. They know the pastors and churches

their shepherd fellowships with, and they can patronise their ministries. It is spiritually wrong for members of a church to go to places they know their pastor has reservations about.

Jesus' flock knew His voice. They did not follow a stranger. The flock should never be confused about who their pastor is. The shepherd is not the associate pastor of the Church but the senior pastor. When a church split occurs and some of the flock follow an associate pastor out of the church, it is a sign that they don't know who their shepherd is. It is scary to witness a church split. The usual pattern has been for the pastor who breaks away to raise unfounded accusations against the senior pastor while the latter curses the former from the pulpit.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

John 10:1-5

Jesus called people who try to influence the flock against the leadership of the pastor, thieves and strangers. They may claim to have visions from the Lord but Jesus said they were thieves and strangers. The congregation must not listen to them. A pastor may not have all the spiritual gifts and abilities to minister to his or her flock in all things. He or she must however, be able to raise other leaders and pastors in the church to minister to the people in every area of need. If the pastor plays his role as the shepherd of the church effectively, the congregation will not lack anything – they will not want.

2. “I SHALL NOT WANT.”

This means that there is no lack in the house. The flock are saved. They are filled with the Holy Ghost and are living fulfilled lives. They are spiritually, physically and financially satisfied. A pastor uses his gifts and the gifts of others to ensure that there is no lack in his church. Jesus Christ ensured that those He sent to do the work of the ministry lacked nothing.

35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing.

36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

Luke 22:35-36

God makes all grace abound towards us. He does not give us some things and deny us others. We have sufficient supply of all things so we can abound in every good work.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

2 Corinthians 9:8

A good pastor is an all-round person. He meets all the needs of the church and not just a few. He is mentally, physically and spiritually sound. It is advantageous for a pastor to be intellectually and spiritually strong. He should be knowledgeable in spiritual things and in the affairs of this world. A solid shepherd provides spiritual, financial, political, and intellectual leadership to the church.

3. “HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES.”

The words “green pastures” mean pastures of tender grass. In the Bible times, green pastures were not just open fields of grass for feeding. They were special places with grass for feeding but more importantly resting, refreshing and cooling from the heat of the sun.

Jesus, the Great Shepherd, feeds His flock and gives them rest. In Matthew chapter eleven, Jesus invited those who labour to come to Him for rest. Jesus’ words gave His flock rest. He employed the miracle working power of God to relieve those who came to Him of spiritual oppression and to free them from the power of the devil.

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The Great Shepherd contrasted His ministry with the destructive work of satan and the deceptive ministries of false Christs, Pharisees and Scribes. He said all who came before Him were thieves and robbers. The good news was that the sheep did not hear them. Pretenders preach lies and promise vanity but the good pastor feeds the flock with the truth.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

In these days of an explosion of knowledge and technology, believers should be careful about the books they read and the television broadcasts they patronise. Deceived members can be in their churches physically, but spiritually strange pastors feed them through their books and television programmes. A good shepherd provides an environment for the flock where they are comfortable and feel protected. They feed in a serene atmosphere. A pastor must do all that he can to ensure that the meeting place of the church is convenient and invigorating. It is immoral for a pastor to live lavishly when his or her church has no appropriate sanctuary to worship in.

4. “HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.”

The Great Shepherd leads His flock beside still waters – waters of stillness in contrast with boisterous waters or stinking stagnant waters. Still waters afford rest, quenching of thirst and cleanliness to the flock. Jesus promises and gives His flock peace. He gives us peace through the presence and ministry of the Holy Ghost.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 14:26-27

A pastor should create a peaceful environment in his church. He has the responsibility to remove divisions, unrest and bitterness from the church. Several years ago, when I was the chairman of the International Presbytery of our ministry, the Fountain Gate Chapel, I noticed deep divisions among the pastors throughout the country. I tried to resolve the issues by blaming the pastors for the widespread confusion among us. After a while, I was convicted one day during my prayer time to take responsibility for what was going on. I realised that the partiality I showed in my relationship with the pastors was partly responsible for the divisions. I repented and started relating with the pastors whom I thought did not agree with me on various issues. After a while, the pastors started relating well with one another. When there is division in a church, the pastor should do well to examine himself or herself. A pastor should make the necessary sacrifices and humble himself or herself to bring peace to the church.

5. “HE RESTORETH MY SOUL.”

The Great Shepherd brings back the souls of His flock from death and destruction. He gives them recovery power. He is the resurrection and the life. He restores the years the cankerworm and the locust have eaten. He brings His people back from captivity and resurrects their dreams.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

John 11:25-26

Pastors restore the souls of their people when they speak wholesome words and support them through crisis. Tragedies befall families and individuals in churches. It is disheartening to note that many people who call themselves pastors don't have the ability to heal the wounds of members who suffer affliction and pain.

The Great Shepherd does not only pastor affluent people. He pastors the broken hearted and those who are down trodden. The prophet Isaiah revealed the

nature of Jesus' ministry hundreds of years before He was born.

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3

We have many people in our churches who try to cope with our religious activities but have lost faith in God. Pastors should provide the necessary avenues through which they can be ministered to. Many pastors are oblivious to the fact that their members need emotional and psychological attention.

6. "HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Jehovah-Rohi leads His flock in the orbits and circuits of righteousness. He leads them in ways and paths that lead to righteousness, God and purpose. He keeps their feet from danger and destruction. He moves them away from ungodly people, sinners and mockers. Jesus Christ promised the disciples the Holy Ghost would come and guide them into all truth. He reproves the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

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

John 16:7-13

The driving force behind unrighteousness is so strong that the Holy Ghost works in believers to empower them to resist sin and bear the fruit of righteousness. A pastor leads the flock in the paths of righteousness through his teachings, way of life and correction. The solid pastor of a solid church teaches and preaches the Word of God that is able to make the people righteous.

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

The task of a pastor entails teaching the flock of God. This task is the most important function of the pastor since sound doctrine is the means by which souls are protected from false doctrines and spiritual deception. The pastor's work is difficult because the flock have itching ears. They crave for teachings that excite them and promise to make life easier for them. Some time ago, I read the writing on the banner of an event in a church, which read – “come and be delivered from all your difficulties.” I wondered how we can possibly be delivered from all our difficulties. Sound doctrine is not enjoyable but we must endure it in order to save our souls from destruction.

7. “I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME.”

The Great Shepherd's sheep do not fear any evil. He delivers them from wild beasts, pitfalls and life threatening situations. Shepherds and their flock are frequently exposed to dangerous situations. The flock must not be afraid because

they are sure of the presence of their shepherd.

The shepherd does not flee when he sees wolves and wild beasts approaching. Jesus, the Great Shepherd said good shepherds don't flee when there is danger. Churches have been invaded by hirelings who pretend to be pastors but are unwilling to risk their lives for the flock.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

John 10:11-14

Supplications, intercessions, visitations and constant communication are the means through which the shepherd keeps fear out of the lives of the flock. A shepherd should be constantly alert because of the danger his or her flock face. Paul warned the leaders of the church from Ephesus of the dangerous people who would rise up to devour the church like wild beasts.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Acts 20:28-31

I have noticed that sometimes the flock don't appreciate their pastors' efforts to deliver them from dangerous people. They take sides with rebellious leaders against their pastors. They are so attached to the people who deceive them that they get offended by their shepherds' attempt to snatch them out of their mouths.

8. “THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME.”

The shepherd is equipped with the rod and staff. The rod refers to a sceptre or staff of office. This is the shepherd's crook by which he defends the flock and rescues them from pits, thickets and troubled waters. The rod of correction is not the main idea here, though the shepherd might use it once in a while to bring the erring sheep back to the fold. The principal aim of the rod and staff is to comfort the flock. The Word of God is the rod of correction that shapes the believers' lives. A rebuke is a rod of correction. Intercessory prayer is a rod that rescues the flock from trouble. God uses people as rods to defend His flock.

The Word of God is the rod that keeps, saves and prevents the flock from destruction.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 1:21-25

The staff is a support, like a stave or crutch, which the shepherd rests on when he cannot sit on the ground for one reason or the other. God uses things like wise counsel, intercessory prayer, the power of the Holy Ghost and people as staffs on which we depend in times of trouble.

The power of God and the grace of God are like the rod and staff of the shepherd. They are the means by which God saves the flock and protects them from evil. Every good shepherd must be equipped with all the spiritual, mental and physical tools he needs to defend and feed his flock. He or she must not be found wanting in any way.

9. “THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME.”

This is another manifestation of the generosity of the Great Shepherd. He

provides a great banquet before the sheep. He also ensures maximum security for them in the presence of their enemies during the feast. The presence of enemies does not prevent a good shepherd from lavishing his goodness on his flock. Jesus Christ demonstrated His readiness to provide for His disciples when He permitted them to eat corn on the Sabbath to the chagrin of the Pharisees and the Scribes.

23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

24 And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

25 And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?

26 How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

27 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:

28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Mark 2:23-28

Jesus Christ refused to allow the religious leaders of His time to use the traditions of men to starve His disciples. There are many enemies of the Gospel in the Body of Christ today who preach strange doctrines that are intended to make believers poor and miserable. A good pastor provides a banquet of the Word of God for the church, in spite of the hostile environment around him. Persecution and opposition should not stop a pastor from teaching the Word of God. Don't use the environment as an excuse to starve God's people.

10. "THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL."

The good shepherd anoints the head of the sheep with oil for many reasons. The oil keeps the head of the sheep cool as it evaporates under the heat of the sun. The oil also possesses healing effects. Another purpose of the oil is to drive fleas and other insects away. Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd gave His disciples power over unclean spirits. He gave them power to tread on serpents and scorpions.

17 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils

are subject unto us through thy name.

18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Luke 10:17-19

A good pastor ensures that his members are constantly under the anointing of the Holy Ghost. He does so by making sure the members of his church are truly born again. The number of people in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches who think they are born again but are not is alarming. A good shepherd gets the believers baptised in the Holy Ghost. A good pastor lays hands on his flock and prays for them to receive spiritual gifts and boldness to live triumphantly. The words of a good pastor are impregnated with spiritual power and life.

11. “MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.”

The good Shepherd ensures that there is more than enough wine at the banquet – cups overflow. Jesus Christ said He came to give us abundant life. He does not give life and blessing sparingly. Abundant life is life, which is spiritually and eternally satisfying. This kind of life has the forgiveness of sins and the fullness of the Holy Ghost. It does not end on earth but runs over into eternity.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

John 10:10

The wine of the Holy Ghost in the form of the infilling of the Spirit and the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost must overflow in the Church. In terms of finances and physical blessings, a pastor should discard the scarcity mentality. Jesus Christ multiplied bread and fed thousands of people with twelve basketsful of crumbs left over.

10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

John 6:10-13

God is able to do “exceeding abundantly” above what we ask for or think. It is not carnal for a pastor to teach his or her flock to walk in prosperity and divine health. Some pastors have negative spirits and spend a lot of their time preaching and warning their flock against prosperity and blessings. Such pastors leave their members poor and deny them the ability to make impact in the society. They may have a genuine concern to attack “the gospel of greed and mammon” but they take things too far. Some preachers have exalted money to the level of God and have troubled the Body of Christ with their greed. We should not allow their waywardness to take us to another extreme by denouncing every kind of blessing. Abundance enables us to reach the world with God’s goodness and mercy.

12. “SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME.”

Goodness refers to all the good things, which come from God— wealth, health, joy and prosperity. **We receive the goodness of God as we practise His Word and walk in obedience. In the event of slip-ups however, we can rely on His mercies. God has pity on us even when we don’t deserve it.**

Religious people wrongly associate evil things with God. They claim that everything, good or evil comes from God. Such folks accept satan’s works as the works of God and do nothing to stop him. In a rather funny way religious people also attribute good things to the devil especially when they are in abundance. If someone is very rich, they accuse him or her of using devilish powers to acquire wealth. These doubting people are quick to say men and women of God who work miracles do so with satan’s power. The Psalmist said “goodness and mercy shall follow me”.

Every good gift comes from the Father of lights. A good pastor teaches his or her congregation to live in the expectation of good things from the Father.

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

James 1:16-17

Jesus Christ taught His disciples that the Father gives good gifts to His children.

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Matthew 7:7-11

The pastor must activate every act of God's goodness and mercy by teaching the Word of God and leading the church to pray with expectation. The Great Shepherd provides for His flock and protects them from evil. He is their Shepherd and He is capable of keeping them to the end. The Psalmist declared that because the LORD was his shepherd he would dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

13. "I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER."

The Great Shepherd's sheep dwelt in His house forever. He did not lose His flock. While He was on the earth, He lost none of His disciples except Judas Iscariot. He interceded for those whom Satan attacked. He rebuked the storms for their sake. The Great Shepherd rebuked His disciples and brought them to repentance when evil and doubting spirits tried to possess their hearts.

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

John 10:28-30

When I was a young pastor I did not see the gravity of losing a soul from the church. I used to say the members came by themselves and if they wanted to leave they could do so. Members don't come to a church by themselves – God

brings them. We must be worried when our flock fall out of fellowship.

The qualities of the Great Shepherd we have seen in this chapter are achievable if pastors subject themselves to the Holy Ghost and the Word. A church can enjoy the ministry of a pastor after God's heart if the members concentrate on his or her life and follow his or her vision. The problem with many churches today is that they have more than one pastor in the congregation. Others have a number of branches of the denomination with many pastors. Having many pastors in a church or denomination breeds the tendency for pastors to be divided and engage in self-promoting attitudes that weaken churches and impede growth. An important step to building a solid church is the attainment of unity in leadership and purpose. A church that recognises one leader, has one vision and moves in one direction is on the road to being a solid one. In the next chapter of this book, I will delve into the benefits of having one leader and one vision in a church.

CHAPTER THREE

ONE LEADER, ONE VISION

A church can only stand and accomplish its vision if it is undivided. Many churches are divided and for that matter cannot stand. Jesus was emphatic in His assertion that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Satan cannot be divided against himself. The devil is prudent enough not to be divided against himself – this knowledge has constantly eluded the Church.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

Matthew 12:25-26

To remain in an undivided state, a house must have one leader and one vision. A solid church moves in one direction. Paul admonished the Ephesians to strive for oneness in their walk with Christ. The Body of Christ is designed to function in oneness. Just as the entire Body of Christ functions in oneness, small groups and local churches should function in oneness.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Ephesians 4:1-7

Many aspects of the oneness of the Body of Christ are projected in the

above Scripture verses, two of which are – oneness in leadership and oneness in vision. Emphasising the oneness in leadership, Paul pointed out that there is one Lord – Jesus Christ. This Lord is not a figurehead. He gives direction to the Body of Christ and empowers it to fulfil its purpose. The apostle also summed up the single vision of the Church as being the one hope of their calling. The believers lived to please God as they looked forward to the coming of the Lord – the second coming of Jesus Christ was their hope.

In order to understand the spiritual significance of believers being in one body and having one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God, I would like us to consider “the church in the wilderness” under Moses’ leadership. The people of Israel were a called out assembly in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Under the leadership of Moses, this “Church”, typifies a people with one leader and one vision.

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

The people of Israel constituted one church in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. Other admirable people like Aaron and Miriam were among the Israelites but God appointed Moses as the leader of His people. Any time they attempted to operate outside the pattern of oneness disaster struck them. The apostle Paul used the Church in the Wilderness to paint a picture of the New Testament Church’s nature.

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The Children of Israel’s oneness is obvious. All their fathers were under the cloud – they were under the protective and preservative presence of God. No one depended on another source of spiritual covering. They all passed through the sea – they used the same route to the Promised Land. They did not resort to individual ways of doing things. They were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea – God placed them under Moses’ leadership. They all ate the same

spiritual meat – there was no special diet for special people. Everybody lived on manna. The Word of God is the means by which the Church lives. They all drank the same spiritual drink from the spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ – the Rock is Jesus who gives the Church the water of the Word of God and the Holy Ghost.

The first element of oneness among the people of Israel I wish to delve into is the oneness of leadership God gave them. Leadership is the most crucial requirement for people to live together. The struggle for leadership is responsible for the wars around the world. Church splits result from the wanton desire for leadership positions.

One Leader – they were all baptised unto Moses.

To be baptised unto Moses means two things. Firstly, it means they were literally covered in water as the water of the sea stood above them on both sides and the cloud over them, as Moses led them through the sea. Secondly, they submitted to Moses and were brought under the precepts and laws he prescribed for them

God's commitment to the leader He chose was obvious among the people of Israel. He demonstrated this in His anger against Aaron and Miriam when they spoke against Moses. They might have considered some of the good qualities they possessed, which Moses lacked, and concluded that if he could be the leader of the people of Israel, so could they.

1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

2 And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.

3 (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) 4 And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5 And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed.

Numbers 12:1-9

God speaks through one leader in the house. Others amplify and re-echo the leader's voice. A church that has many heads or leaders is a hydra headed beast. The difference between the head pastor of a church and associate pastors should be clearly defined. The weakness in the present day Church lies in the rampant splits due to the unbridled ambition of individuals to become the founders and overseers of their own ministries. The slightest sign of the anointing on them thrusts them out of the church to start something they call theirs. Self inflicted offences contaminate the spirits of leaders in churches and lead them to set up rival ministries that expend their energies in fighting the previous ministries they belonged to.

Several years ago, I was involved in a reconciliation effort to hold together a church that was threatening to break up. This church had two leaders who were gifted in different ways. One of them was a great preacher with a charismatic personality while the other though not charismatic was mature in character and administratively astute. The tension in the church reached a crescendo in a meeting when the matured pastor insisted he could not work with the other pastor and wanted his own ministry. He expressed his frustration in the strongest of terms. All effort to keep them together in the vibrant church failed and they parted company. The charismatic pastor went his way with the members of the church who were attached to him to start his own church whereas the mature pastor held on to what was left of a weakened church. The two churches have since not been able to match the former one in grace and power.

Leadership issues are no respecter of persons. No pastor is too anointed to go through leadership crises in ministry. We should not be shocked to see members of the local church choose other leaders over us. The apostle Paul was a great man of God but some of the people he ministered to followed other men of God like the apostle Peter and Apollos instead of him.

11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of

Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 1:11-13

There may be times you have to release some people in your ministry to follow those they choose to follow. John the Baptist lost some of his followers to Jesus Christ but he was not bitter. After he had done a selfless job of declaring that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, Andrew and another disciple followed Jesus never to return to John the Baptist.

35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

John 1:35-42

Don't feel belittled when people leave your ministry. Rejoice with others when they draw a following according to the will of Jesus Christ the Head of the Church. John the Baptist said a man can receive nothing except it is given him from heaven. Your members cannot leave your ministry if God wants them to remain in it.

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:27-30

The question of leadership is important for the stability and growth of a church. A church should never be confused about who its pastor or leader is. Some members of churches adopt other men of God who appear to have some supernatural powers as their private prophets and counsellors. They depend on them for direction while neglecting the counsel and teachings of their own pastors. Within the local church individuals rise up and claim to have powers and knowledge with which they draw a following after themselves. The apostle Paul insisted on his position as the father of the churches he raised. He protested against the tendency of the believers to be led astray by other ministers with different motives. He emphasised that they may have ten thousand instructors in Christ but not many fathers.

14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

1 Corinthians 4:14-16

It is discouraging to labour and raise a ministry only for the members to allow themselves to be misled by other men and women of God. Some pastors labour to raise their members only for them to find other preachers later in life and abandon the ones who raised them. This attitude becomes worse when they go further than depending on others and deny that the former pastor ever had any influence on them. A leader should not watch his congregation drift into deception without a protest. Church members can be so confused about their commitment that they support other ministries while they neglect their own. Bitterness grows in a pastor when he sees his members support other ministries while they abandon him.

A church with divided allegiance is not a solid one. Though I stated earlier

that we should rejoice when people leave us to follow others according to God's plan, it is careless to just watch people leave. We must do the right things to keep those God gives us and do our best to prevent them from leaving in the wrong manner. The apostle Paul insisted on his apostleship to the churches he raised.

1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

3 Mine answer to them that do examine me is this,

4 Have we not power to eat and to drink?

5 Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

6 Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

7 Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?

8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

12 If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

The prerequisite for a solid church is to have a formidable leader to whom

others defer. Leadership is however, a position of honour and you must not lord it over others. A good leader surrounds himself or herself with competent individuals or groups of people who advise and assist him or her to fulfil the institution's or church's vision. He or she is accountable to the boards or committees in the house. A leader must be conscious of the fact that he or she is not above the law – the set of rules that exists in the system applies to him or her.

People don't gather to "worship" or "celebrate" a leader and satisfy his personal desires but to fulfil God's purpose. To have them focused on this purpose a clear vision must be put before them. If a church lacks vision it degenerates into a personality cult. This is one of the weaknesses of the Church today – personality oriented ministry. It is therefore imperative for leadership and vision to be considered together.

We have looked at the fact that the Church in the wilderness had one leader. Another point I want us to consider is they had one vision. Moses was the leader and he led the people to fulfil one vision. Having a leader and a vision are closely related.

One Vision – Moses led the people of Israel towards the Promised Land.

Some individuals usurped authority and tried to change the vision. They caused delays in the journey and constantly attacked Moses. These saboteurs incited the people to rebel against Moses – they even attempted to stone him. The rebellion reached a climax when the people wanted to raise their own leaders to take them back to Egypt.

1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

Numbers 14:1-4

The rebels tried to change the vision but God was not pleased with them and overthrew them in the wilderness. Moses was taking them to the Promised Land

but they wanted to go back into bondage. They did not want to pay the price for freedom – obeying God’s voice was too difficult for them. Many congregations like leaders who give them what they want instead of God’s will.

It is possible for people with different gifts and temperaments to work towards fulfilling the same vision in a church. People often think they have different visions and for that matter cannot fit into the bigger vision of the church, whereas in actual fact their vision could be part of the same big picture. For example, a farmer who sees a vision of harvesting ears of corn may think he has a different vision from another farmer who has a vision of planting corn seeds and watering the plants. The truth is that these two farmers have the same vision of growing corn. The only difference is that they are seeing different stages of the same thing. If they belong to the same group, one does not have to leave to form another company.

Paul captured this process well by explaining to the Corinthians that he planted and Apollos watered but it was God who gave the increase (the harvest).

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

The apostle continued his trend of thinking about the process involved in the fulfilment of a vision by comparing the work of the ministry with the building of a house. When building a house, the foundation is laid and then various materials are used to construct it. The person who lays the foundation may be different from the one who continues with the superstructure but it is the same building under construction.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is

Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

The reason for a good number of the cases of confusion in churches is the absence of a clearly spelt out vision. One of the ways to make the vision plain to people is to have mission and vision statements. Businesses, churches, homes and nations should have mission and vision statements that clearly spell out their purposes. Secular bodies understand the need for stated and articulated visions but many churches consider them carnal. They misunderstand being led by the Spirit to mean moving in any direction one feels like going. Having a stated vision is a spiritual thing and not carnal. The Holy Ghost leads us by giving us clear direction and vision.

The difference between a mission statement and vision statement is sometimes confusing, with various groups defining them differently. The mission statement states why an entity exists – its “raison d’être” – and its present state. It defines what the company does best on a constant basis. The company’s purpose, moral integrity, body of beliefs, mode of operation and target group are captured in the mission statement. A vision statement states what the company intends to become in the future. It captures the guiding steps and inspirational efforts that are employed to attain the desired future state. The vision statement embodies the framework of the strategic plan of the company.

The leaders and members of most churches don’t know the vision of the church. They are attendees without focus, who are just happy to be in church. To build a solid church we must teach the entire church the mission and vision of the church. These must be carefully taught and implanted in members.

The book of Proverbs says people perish when they have no vision. Believers who have no vision in a ministry waste their lives on issues that have no effect on their eternal lives. They become carnal and sometimes backslide

from the faith.

18 Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

Proverbs 29:18

God's Word translation of the Bible says people run wild when they have no prophetic vision.

18 Without prophetic vision people run wild, but blessed are those who follow {God's} teachings.

Proverbs 29:18 (God's Word)

The Message translation captures the same verse in a more dramatic fashion. It says if the people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves.

18 If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.

Proverbs 29:18 (The Message)

The vision of a church must be written down for the people to read. Our ministry, the Fountain Gate Chapel, formed a committee to craft the wording of our mission and vision statements. As the founder of the church I knew our vision and direction but I gave it to a spiritual committee to put it in clear words for the people to understand.

There is no alternative to writing down a vision. Members respond to written visions more than to those that are not written. God commanded Habakkuk to write down the vision and make it clear on tablets.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Habakkuk 2:2-3

Writing down a mission and vision statement is not an easy thing to do. In some situations, the pastor of a church may have to employ the services of experts to help him or her frame the mission and vision statements.

Having a clear mission and vision helps to steer a church away from a personality-oriented church to a principle-oriented one. I was able to step down from my position as the Chairman of the International Presbytery of our ministry because we had a vision. The church does not exist to please me but to fulfil an assignment, which is captured in our mission and vision statements. For over four years now the church is growing from strength to strength under the leadership of its new Chairman. A solid church has a succession plan – it has the capacity to outlast its founder.

In some situations, the reason for confusion and church splits is not the lack of a clear vision but the love of money and material gain. There are selfish individuals in churches who want their own ministry just as a means of making money. Some founders and general overseers of churches use the church as a moneymaking business thereby bringing the Gospel into disrepute. Associate pastors and church leaders also become victims of the money loving demons and foment confusion in order to find excuses to break away from the church and start their own ministries. The apostle Paul warned Timothy about the love of money. He identified it as the root of evil, which some people covet after to the peril of their souls.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:6-12

It is immoral for an associate pastor to accuse his or her senior pastor of

non-existing offences just to find an excuse to draw a following after himself or herself. The people who do this usually end up leading unsuspecting members of the church astray only to exploit them later on. They teach false doctrines and use intimidation to fleece the sheep. Their motive of material gain is covered under a barrage of spiritual pretence as they charge out of the church to form another church, which takes the people nowhere.

The strength and stability of a church lies in its oneness. It has one leader and one vision. Another aspect of a church's oneness is oneness in spirit – the Body of Christ has one Spirit and so must every local church have one Spirit. God has given the Church one Spirit in the person of the Holy Ghost. He fills the Church, gives it life and empowers it to function. In the next chapter we shall consider the common Spirit God has given the Church – we have one Spirit.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE SPIRIT

Regardless of the Christian denomination or local assembly, the Body of Christ has one Spirit. The Church is blessed with a wonderful sense of diversity, which is sometimes misunderstood to be division. The world uses the diversity among believers to accuse them of not being united in Spirit and doctrine. Diversity should produce efficiency and beauty. Unfortunately, in many instances it leads to chaos and confusion because it is not well managed. God does not create diversity to precipitate confusion. He is not the author of confusion.

33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

1 Corinthians 14:33

To reap the benefits of diversity, our lives and ministries must be bound together by a strong cord of love and this is what the Holy Ghost does. There are two main spirits in the world namely the Holy Ghost and satan. The Holy Ghost fills believers and uses them to accomplish God's purposes while satan operating directly or through demons uses unbelievers to destroy. The apostle Paul encouraged the Church of his day to be Holy Ghost controlled. He reminded them that they had "one Spirit."

THE MEANING OF "ONE SPIRIT"

What makes something good or bad is the spirit behind it. A church that is bound together and controlled by one Spirit is strong in the presence of diversity. If on the other hand, satan manipulates believers in a church, selfishness ruins the beauty of diversity. The apostle Paul admonished the Ephesians to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity is a thing of the Holy Ghost whereas division is of the devil.

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Ephesians 4:3-4

To have one Body there must be one Spirit. Different spirits produce different bodies. To attain the state of one Body and one Spirit we must "endeavour." The word "endeavour" means "to make speed", "to be prompt",

“to be diligent”, “to labour”, “to study” and “to be earnest.” It takes great effort to achieve a state of unity and oneness of Spirit. The Body of Christ must attain a oneness of Spirit promptly. Due diligence must be applied to teaching the Word of God to have the Church do so.

There are several aspects to oneness in Spirit. Understanding the Church’s oneness of Spirit enables it to function efficiently and edify itself in love. Let us examine what the apostle Paul meant by “one Spirit”:

The person of the Holy Ghost.

The apostle must have had the person of the Holy Ghost in mind when he talked about “one Spirit.” We have to know the Holy Ghost before we can maintain viable fellowship with Him. In contemporary Charismatic Pentecostal Christian circles the overemphasis on the gifts of the Holy Ghost is quenching the desire to know the person of the Holy Ghost. The person of the Holy Ghost should take precedence over the manifestation of His gifts and power. God gave the Holy Ghost to the Church to abide with it forever. He is the Spirit of truth who helps the Church to fulfil its mission on earth and maintain its connection to the Father.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

John 14:16-18

Many churches have huge numbers of unbelievers and carnal believers. Unbelievers are controlled by the devil and their senses. Carnal believers spend a great deal of time developing their senses and satisfying the desires of the flesh. These attitudes lead to various manifestations of the flesh that make it difficult for the Church to be one in Spirit. If believers develop their relationship with the Holy Ghost and increase in the revelation of who He is and His works, oneness will be attained quickly.

The expression “One Spirit” refers to the person of the Holy Ghost. By this expression the apostle Paul must have also had the purpose of the Church in mind. The Holy Ghost constantly reminds the Church about its purpose. A solid church is focused on its Holy Ghost given purpose.

The purpose of the Holy Ghost.

Believers should engage in only the purposes of the Spirit. Selfish human agendas destroy the soundness of churches. We should know the mind of the Spirit and execute His purposes. Leaders who know the mind of the Spirit lead their churches in the same direction and not in the pursuit of their own ambitions. It is dangerous to evolve your own egocentric plans and try to drag the church along to fulfil them.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:27-28

If you know what the mind of the Spirit is, all things will work together for your good but if you don't, confusion and division occur. A solid church has a well-defined purpose that is given by the Holy Ghost. A common purpose protects the Church from destruction.

Churches mix business and financial interests with the work of the ministry. Political agendas dominate the activities and messages of some churches that compromise with the world. It is sad to note that worldliness has invaded the church to the point where spirituality is mocked and carnality is celebrated. Wealthy and politically influential churches are deceived into thinking God is pleased with them. Jesus Christ's condemnation of the Laodicean Church is applicable to many churches in our time.

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of

thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Revelation 3:14-18

Ancient Laodicea was a rich banking centre. The financial position of the city deceived the church there into thinking it was rich. The city was also noted for the manufacturing of black wool and special eye salve for curing eye diseases. These endowments of the city deceived the Laodiceans further into thinking they were gorgeously clothed and had perfect vision. The lukewarm church thought they were rich but Jesus Christ said they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. They confused false riches with the true riches, which are spiritual in nature. The world considers big and financially rich churches as being successful but God's way of assessing people is different. The Laodicean spirit makes churches deviate from the purposes of the Holy Ghost in an attempt to impress the world. Activities and doctrines are directed at generating carnal things that believers think make them acceptable.

Another aspect of the expression "one Spirit" is the power of the Holy Ghost. The apostle Paul knew that it was only through the power of the Holy Ghost that a solid church could be built. The human mind by itself cannot build a solid church. Pretenders who try to build false churches with satanic power under the pretext of building churches for Jesus Christ fizzle out quickly and leave behind casualties. Never in the history of the Church have church leaders been accused of using occult powers to build churches than now. The greed for power, money and fame drives church leaders to seek satanic powers with which they control their followers.

The power of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus Christ promised His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Ghost came upon them.

It was by this power that they would be His witnesses throughout the world. The disciples went on to turn the world upside down in no time because they were propelled by the power of the Holy Ghost.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1:8

A church, which is a witness for Jesus Christ, portrays His life and

demonstrates His power. The disciples made impact on the world by being His witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judaea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The apostle Paul established his churches in the power of the Holy Ghost and not human wisdom. He did not resort to gimmicks and fleshly methods. The wise master builder did not build churches whose faith was based on human wisdom but on God's power.

4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

Many churches today depend on human wisdom. They employ human methods like brainwashing, intimidation and hypnotism to hold members captive. For some time, such methods may look successful because large numbers of people attend services with the hope of receiving miracles and other forms of spiritual assistance. With time however, the web of deception breaks and the people find their way out of the church. A lasting church is founded on the power of the Holy Ghost and the enduring truth of the Word of God.

Thousands of churches around the world close their doors each year due to a lack of Holy Ghost power. These churches engage in rituals and ceremonies to the neglect of prayer. They emphasise philanthropic activities and shun spiritual warfare. The power of the Holy Ghost is seen as a subject that breeds confusion and believers who exercise spiritual gifts are persecuted. Such churches are bound to die because the power of the Holy Ghost is the only means by which the Church can live.

“One Spirit” refers to the Church being filled with the Holy Ghost as it pursues His purpose through the manifestation of His power and the display of the fruit of the Spirit. We can only say we have one Spirit when we bear the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is the product of the Spirit. The main component of the fruit of the Spirit is love. Jesus said it is by loving one another that the world would know that those who profess Him are His disciples.

The product of the Holy Ghost.

The fruit of the Spirit that believers bear is the product of the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who looks at believers should be able to tell that they have one Spirit. They are born by the Holy Ghost and therefore should have His character. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit described in the above verses of Scripture makes a church solid. Even a cursory glance at the elements of the fruit of the Spirit above is enough to convince you that a church that bears this fruit is unified and focused on fulfilling its purpose. The product of the Spirit prevents the cultivation of carnal tendencies that destroy churches. It is likely that some individuals or groups in Paul's day operated under the influence of other spirits and bore the wrong kinds of fruit. We must work hard to secure the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Knowing the character of the Holy Ghost and bearing His fruit empowers the Church to make impact. This kind of knowledge motivates believers to live peacefully with others. The flesh does not compel them to destroy the Church when they are rejected or offended. Jesus Christ reminded James and John of the kind of Spirit they had when they threatened to call fire down on the people of Samaria for rejecting Jesus. He reminded them that they did not have the spirit of Elijah that employs fire to devour its enemies but the Spirit of Christ that forgives its enemies.

52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

Churches go up in flames when brethren are offended. Church members pull out of the departments in which they serve and leaders form groups within churches to resist the pastors they resent. Walk into most congregations and the tensions are obvious. Stiff looking leaders who praise God and curse one another at the same time occupy the front pews. The James and John fire-calling-spirit finds a comfortable seat among church leaders. It also manifests itself in the pulpit as pastors curse the congregation at the least provocation and persecute those who disagree with them.

The apostle Paul assured the Corinthians that he and his co-labourers had the same spirit and walked in the same steps. They were not motivated by different motives. The Holy Ghost produced the same character traits of faithfulness in them. The apostle and those who walked with him laboured to produce godly character in the believers they raised. He expected the Corinthians to bear the same fruit he and Titus had, but strangely they produced negative fruits like contention, jealousy, bitter feeling, a partisan spirit, ill-natured talk, backbiting, undue eulogy and unrest.

18 I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?

19 Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

2 Corinthians 12:18-20

Solid churches should set codes of conduct for their members and leaders. Sadly, many don't. An unfortunate incident took place in a church where a song leader had sexual affairs with many of the singers in the choir and destroyed the entire group. The leadership of the church looked on as this promiscuous man went on a rampage. This case is not an isolated case. Sexual scandals are common in church choirs, prayer groups and other departments. In some cases pastors are the perpetrators of hideous sins in the church. The Church must take a strong stance against immoral conduct and discipline those in the fold who commit acts of immorality. It is wrong to make moral deviants comfortable in the church in the name of love.

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

It takes a lot of effort to attain oneness in Spirit. That is why the apostle Paul admonished the Ephesians “to endeavour” to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let us consider how to bring the Body of Christ to the place of having one Spirit.

HOW TO ATTAIN ONENESS OF SPIRIT

The Church must strive to attain oneness of Spirit. We will be filled with, led and controlled by one Spirit if we do certain things. Some of the secrets to walking in oneness of Spirit can be found in the lives of the Children of Israel during their journey through the wilderness. God raised one Church by taking them through certain processes.

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The various points in incorporating the Israelites into one Spirit guide us to live and walk in one Spirit. The first thing I wish to point out in the journey to the Promised Land is the baptism of the people unto Moses.

Dying to the self.

The Children of Israel were baptised unto Moses. This means they were at his command – no one did his or her own will. They were dead to the self. The

spiritual significance of believers being baptised in water is that the old man is dead and buried while a new man in Christ emerges from the water.

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:3-4

If individuals are dead to the flesh and alive to Christ, carnality in a church will be eliminated thus making the Body of Christ stronger. A church becomes weak when individuals fail to die to the self. Believers in the Body of Christ must constantly reckon themselves as being dead to the self.

Though the people of Israel were baptised unto Moses, they failed to tame their appetite from lusting after the food they ate in Egypt. Their lust produced rebellion in them and they murmured against God.

4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Numbers 11:4-6

Carnal believers with uncircumcised hearts occupy church pews and crave for the things of the world, which they are supposed to have been weaned from. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life control them because they have not died to the flesh in baptism. If we are dead to the self we are supposed to overcome the lust for the things of the world.

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

1 John 2:15-17

God gives believers double baptism namely, water baptism and the Holy Ghost baptism, to empower them against the lust of the flesh. Apart from water baptism, believers are baptised in the Holy Ghost just as the people of Israel were baptised unto Moses. The baptism of the Holy Ghost empowers members of a church to walk in oneness. It is not merely a spiritual exercise to enable believers speak in other tongues. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost filled the believers in the Upper Room and since then He abides with the Body of Christ forever.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:3-4

The Holy Ghost submerged the fears and weaknesses of the early disciples and overwhelmed them with His power after they were baptised in the Holy Ghost. Baptism in the Holy Ghost mortifies the deeds of the flesh and releases the power of God in believers.

Another way to attain oneness of Spirit is for God's people to have examples they look at. Having a picture of the ideal situation in view, makes it easy for you to become what you want to be.

One example in the person of Jesus Christ.

The people of Israel were baptised unto Moses. He was also their example in godliness. They looked up to him for inspiration and trusted him to take them to the Promised Land. To attain oneness we must have a common example to look up to.

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of a life that pleases God.

He showed the way and taught His disciples to follow His example.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

John 13:15

Jesus is the ultimate example but it is helpful if we have human models or examples whose lives tell us that it is possible to live victoriously. The Israelites

had Moses. Every ministry must have an example. Jesus Christ empowers men and women to follow His example so others can look up to them. The apostle Paul was one of the main followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul followed Jesus' example and became an example to the believers.

1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

As a faithful servant of God, Paul followed the example Jesus set for him and admonished the believers he raised to follow his manner of life. He was bold enough to use himself as the example Timothy should follow.

Timothy emulated Paul and served as an example for the believers who observed his manner of Life.

Paul attested to the fact that Timothy emulated his manner of life.

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

2 Timothy 3:10

The believers who were under Timothy's oversight followed his example.

Paul told the young preacher to be an example in word, character, love, spirit, faith and purity.

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

The sequence of the arrangement of examples Paul laid out was firstly Jesus Christ, secondly Paul, thirdly Timothy and fourthly the believers. If leaders model their lives after Christ and motivate others to emulate their examples, solid churches will emerge. The situation in which leaders worthy of emulation are lacking in a church is a disturbing one. It is even worse when the members of a congregation abandon their shepherd and follow the bad examples of strange "men of God". Sheep follow their shepherds because they know their voices. They don't follow the voice of strangers.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

John 10:4-5

To attain oneness of Spirit a church must be fed with “one Word of God” – one doctrine. Many strange interpretations of the Word of God find their way into churches and lead people astray. In these days of increased television, radio and Internet broadcasting of the Word of God, it is extremely difficult to raise a church that is not influenced by other ministries. A solid church is one in which the pastor is sound in his or her knowledge of the Word of God and teaches the flock with authority.

One Word.

The Church in the wilderness under Moses’ leadership ate “the same spiritual meat.” The equivalent of spiritual meat in the New Testament Church is the Word of God. Confusion arises when individuals smuggle their own interpretations of the Word of God into churches. Such confused persons challenge the position of the church on doctrine and practices and seek to draw a following after themselves. The apostle Paul warned the Galatians against the infiltration of the church by people who had different doctrines.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:8-9

The Bible warns us against receiving those who carry strange doctrines into our homes. It warns that if we receive such people we are partakers of their sins.

10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

2 John 1:10-11

The Israelites who followed Moses drank the water from the same spiritual Rock that followed them. Members of a solid church don’t feed on the Word of God from suspicious sources. They don’t run about town in search of a word from the Lord and spiritual ministrations. They believe in the grace of God on

their church and depend on it for spiritual edification.

The final way of attaining oneness of Spirit I wish to touch on is the issue of the impartation of the Spirit. A solid church practises the impartation of the Spirit from one person to the other.

One impartation.

By being baptised unto Moses, the people of Israel did not only submit to his authority but believed in the anointing on his life. They were so confident in this anointing that God took the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy selected elders.

24 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

Numbers 11:24-25

The apostle Paul laid his hands on Timothy and he received the gift of God. Timothy received the gift of God in Paul and later on imparted the same gift to the disciples under his oversight.

6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:6-7

To refresh our memory, a summary of the Christian experience of having one Spirit is helpful. A solid church is built by walking in oneness of Spirit. We live and walk in one Spirit by engaging the Person of the Spirit through knowledge and fellowship, executing His purpose, exercising His Power and expressing His Product. We spread the influence of one Spirit throughout the churches through the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the chain of examples, the Word of God and the impartation of the Spirit.

So far we have considered a number of things that make churches solid. These are foundational principles we must observe in our bid to build churches

that serve humanity and glorify God. It is crucial at this juncture to mention that we cannot build something until we know what it will eventually look like. The ultimate goal of a venture must be established before we start the journey to accomplish it. In the next chapter, we shall consider the ultimate goal of the Church.

CHAPTER FIVE

JESUS CHRIST, THE ULTIMATE GOAL

No matter the language a church uses to outline its mission and vision, its ultimate goal should be to attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Anything other than this falls short of the ultimate goal. The general observation is that most churches don't have Jesus as the centre of their mission.

There are two kinds of churches in the Body of Christ namely, weak churches and solid ones:

A weak church is a church that is not adequately resourced spiritually and physically to function efficiently. Such a church lacks the power of God and is volatile in the sense that it exists today and disappears tomorrow. A weak church collapses due to moral failure and acts of fleshly indulgence.

A solid church is a church that is established on the foundation of the Word of God and is spiritually and physically equipped to fulfil the Great Commission and edify itself in love. A solid church is impregnable to satan's attacks and man's schemes. It is pure in nature and has the capacity to transform the world around it.

Members of a church should be reminded that if they build a bad church none of them would escape the consequences of doing so. Those who think they have nothing to lose also lose spiritual and physical benefits if a church is weak. We lose together and we win together. No church member or individual pastor goes up or down alone. We have one future.

A church can only be solid if everybody in it strives towards one ultimate goal. If they don't do so but pursue different objectives, their future is bleak. A well-defined goal preserves the doctrine, character and practices of a church. The situation in which church denominations have several local churches poses challenges when the individual churches pursue different objectives and ideals. In some denominations the human head of the organisation makes himself or herself the ultimate goal or object of attention. The church is taught to focus on him or her. The people live to satisfy him or her. They copy his or her lifestyle, even if his or her example leads them into error. This unhealthy precedence tempts other leaders in the denomination to set themselves up as "smaller gods" and demand the attention of those under their leadership. This is not good leadership. A solid church has one leader and one vision. This leader is a servant of Christ who directs the believers to Jesus Christ. He is a servant and not a master. Jesus Christ is not the ultimate goal of many churches – physical projects

and human beings have taken His place.

“TILL”

Many churches have completely deviated from the ultimate goal they should be pursuing. They are busily building man-made organizations and institutions with huge sums of money, power, political influence and big congregations. These deviant churches have fallen into the endless and bottomless pit of fleshly desires. The Church must change its direction quickly. Our calculated acts of the flesh have displaced Jesus Christ from the centre of the Church and we have to reposition ourselves to let Him take His place. He introduced Himself to the apostle John as the one in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The seven candlesticks represent the Church. He is not on the sides of the candlesticks or under them but in the midst of them.

12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Revelation 1:12-13

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the seven candlesticks. He is not peripheral but central in the Church. As the head of the Church, He is not an auxiliary subject to be mentioned once in a while but the apex of the Christian life. In this position He is the centre of attraction of the Church. It is difficult to concentrate on Jesus due to the numerous forces of distraction in the Church. The main objective of the five-fold ministry is to build the Church up TILL we all attain unto the unity of the faith in Christ.

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

*13 **Till** we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

Ephesians 4:11-13 (emphasis mine)

The task of the five-fold ministry is to build up the Body of Christ till it

portrays Jesus Christ perfectly on earth. The preposition “till” in the above Scripture reference is important to our study on building a solid church. It is the Greek word ***mechris*** which means “as far as”, “up to a certain point” and “terminus.” “Till” in this context sets Jesus Christ as the terminus of the Christian faith. He is “as far as” one can go. There is no one or nothing beyond Him.

The Body of Christ has the arduous task of feeding itself with the Word of God and being influenced by the Holy Ghost until a certain spiritual state is attained. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the Body of Christ have the task of building it to portray the image of Christ. It is strange that many churches boast of being spiritual and mature when they don't have any of the indicators the apostle Paul set for a mature church.

Carnal believers graduate from discipleship classes for converts and stop growing in Christ. Their pastors deviate from the teachings that can make them grow and squander their efforts in teachings that promote the flesh and inspire vanity. The believers lose interest in spiritual things and are entangled in the modern-day doctrine of materialism and secularism.

Ephesians 4:13 describes the spiritual state the Body of Christ is supposed to attain. The Church cannot be complacent. An honest assessment of believers today indicates clearly that we are far from attaining the state of the fullness of Christ. A solid church is one that is focused on attaining the required state of maturity whereas a weak church is not.

THE REQUIRED SPIRITUAL STATE

God has set the standards He wants the Church to attain. Man-made standards don't glorify God. In a world that is steeped in deception, a church's standards are measured by numerical strength, financial power, social status, political influence and emotional expression. When a church is described as a “powerful church” or “mega church” no reference whatsoever is made to the standards God sets for the Body of Christ.

Complacency has robbed many churches of the spiritual hunger to build solid churches. The Church must be built TILL some specific spiritual INDICATORS are realised. The spiritual indicators of a solid church listed in Ephesians 4:13 are:

- ~ The unity of the faith.
- ~ The knowledge of the Son of God.

~ A perfect man.

~ The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Ephesians 4:13

A brief discussion of these indicators can deepen our spiritual lives and empower us to build solid churches. We often read Ephesians 4:13 but fail to delve into the details of the indicators the apostle Paul has set for a solid church.

1. The unity of the faith.

By the term “the faith”, the apostle Paul was talking about the way to salvation through the Gospel of Christ. In Paul’s time, false teachers tried to teach the false doctrine of salvation through works. Some of them insisted that one could not be saved except through the observance of the Mosaic Law. Ablutions and abstinence from meats were emphasised by adherents to the Mosaic Law who pretended to be Christians.

The apostle Paul testified to the Philippians that he did not have his own righteousness through the Law of Moses but rather through faith in Jesus Christ. His righteousness was obtained through faith in Jesus Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Philippians 3:8-9

The believers around the world in Paul’s day were divided in the faith. Apart from erroneous faith in the Mosaic Law, some confused believers placed their faith in human beings like Paul, Peter and Apollos. The apostle Paul contended to establish the Church on faith in Jesus Christ. A weak church is divided with leaders trying to draw a following after themselves. These self-proclaimed leaders deceive members into believing that they have special revelations that can give them deeper access to holiness and the power of God.

Jude admonished the believers of his day to contend earnestly for the faith.

This gives us the idea that faith in Christ is constantly being contested by wrong doctrines that seek to lure people into seeking their own righteousness.

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:3-4

The five-fold ministry has the arduous task of bringing the Body of Christ to the point where we are united in the faith. Jesus said He is the way, the truth and the life. No man goes to the Father except through Him.

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 14:6

There is no other name under heaven through which men can be saved. This message should sound loud and clear in the Church and throughout the world. Preachers are compromising with the world by making it look as if people can be saved through other religions. They are so soft in their presentation of Jesus Christ as Saviour that the world is comfortable with its deceptive forms of doctrine.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

The Church of today is divided in the faith. Cult figures have succeeded in making people put their faith in them. These leaders claim to have the power to forgive sins and purify their followers of spiritual contamination. They claim to have spiritual powers that make them superhuman. Pretentious religious activities have found their way into the Church. People are made to bathe in so-called holy rivers and water. Animals are sacrificed to demons in the name of making sacrifices to God. We are in dangerous times. Dubious elements have crept into the Body of Christ unawares and are turning believers away from the

grace of God.

A solid church is one that is built on faith in Jesus Christ. The believer's salvation is established on the finished work of redemption through Jesus Christ. He doesn't strive for salvation through his own righteousness. The Body of Christ's deviation from the faith is not obvious to the average observer. Those who look at things more closely would however, notice human leaders are gradually displacing Jesus Christ in the Church and strange religious practices are taking the place of the simple Gospel of Christ.

The second indicator of the required spiritual state a solid church should attain is the knowledge of the Son of God. The Body of Christ considers the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God a simple thing that does not need constant mention and teaching. We take it for granted that everybody knows that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This assumption is denying the Church its most potent revelation that separates it from the religions of the world. This revelation is the manifestation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God in the flesh. How many times do you hear teachings about Jesus Christ as the Son of God in church?

2. The knowledge of the Son of God.

During His earthly life, Jesus Christ revealed His deity by emphatically stating He was the Son of God. The Jews understood the implication of saying He was the Son of God and they tried to stone Him for making that claim.

17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

John 5:17-18

The term "Son of God" refers to the incarnation of Christ in which God became flesh. A solid church is established in the revelation of the incarnation of Christ in the flesh. The knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is no longer the emphasis of the Church. The apostle Paul admonished the church in Ephesus to be built by the five-fold ministry till they came to the knowledge of the Son of God.

The entire Body of Christ is to come to the knowledge of the Son of God. The word "knowledge" in Ephesians 4:13 is the Greek word *epignōsis* which means "acknowledgement", "recognition" and "full discernment." The Greek

renderings of the word “knowledge” show clearly that it is more than casual awareness of someone’s presence. It is not a brief exposure to a person. To have knowledge of the Son of God is to fully discern Him. We should know Him in Spirit and in truth.

The preachers and teachers in the Body of Christ, have stopped preaching Christ and teaching about Him. They have done so when the Body of Christ is far from reaching the full level of the knowledge of the Son of God. In the days of the early apostles, they admitted the fact that the depths of revelation about Jesus Christ were inexhaustible. The apostle Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 3:8-9

I hear about preachers and teachers who teach on various subjects, which don’t emphasise Jesus Christ. One day I asked the Lord in prayer why preachers don’t talk about Jesus Christ these days. His answer was they don’t talk about Him because they don’t know Him. We cannot talk about the glorified Christ in heaven when we don’t have the revelation of His present day ministry and His preparation for the Second Coming.

The apostle Paul was fully committed to the pursuit of Jesus Christ. He wanted to know Him and be identified with Him. He never relented in his effort to know his Saviour and Lord.

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Philippians 3:10

There are three things we must know about the Son of God namely, the designation of the Son of God, the declaration of the Son of God and the decoration of the Son of God.

✓ God the Father has given Jesus Christ the DESIGNATION of the Son of God.

Jesus Christ though being equal with God, took upon Him the form of a servant. Through this act and His sufferings, God gave Him a name that is above every name. God the Father conferred the Name that is above any name on Jesus Christ – the designation or name “Son of God” expresses His person and the honour He has.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

God the Father designated Jesus Christ the Son of God. He has gone further to declare Him the Son of God to all creation.

✓ **God the Father DECLARED Jesus Christ the Son of God.**

At Jesus' baptism, God the Father declared Him His only begotten Son in whom He was well pleased.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Luke 3:21-22

The apostle Paul revealed that Jesus Christ has been declared the Son of God. We must continue to declare Him the Son of God in the Church and to the world. The religions of the world don't want to hear this. The Jews don't

understand it and the Muslims consider such a declaration blasphemy but that is what the Christian faith is all about and we are not ashamed to declare Jesus Christ the Son of God.

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

Romans 1:1-4

The Apostle Peter received high commendation from Jesus Christ when he declared Him the Son of the living God. It is interesting to note that he did not receive such praise for casting out devils or healing the sick. Peter's feat of walking on water did not move Jesus as much as his declaration that He was the Son of the living God.

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:13-19

After declaring Jesus the Son of God, God the Father decorated Him with

kingly honour when He was begotten from the dead and made to sit on the throne of glory far above principalities and powers.

✓ **God the Father DECORATED Jesus Christ with kingly honour and glory.**

He placed Him above all His angels and creation. God the Father bestowed kingly power and honour on Jesus Christ. The Church is losing touch with the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the glorified Christ. We have allowed the religions of the world to make Jesus comparable with the religious leaders of sects and cults.

5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Hebrews 1:5-8

The apostle Paul urged the Church to aspire to attain the knowledge of the Son of God. We are to agree with God the Father by declaring Jesus Christ the Son of God and bowing to His glory as the Lord of lords. The apostle also told the Church to endeavour to attain the state of a perfect man. By this admonition, he was likening the church to a human being who has to grow until he or she reaches the stage of maturity.

The Body of Christ has to attain the state of the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. The state of unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God define the level of maturity of the Body of Christ. Mature churches are united in the doctrine of Christ and have the knowledge of the Son of God. These indicators of spiritual maturity increase as the Body of Christ grows “unto a perfect man” – full maturity. The third indicator of a solid church in Ephesians 4:13 is that it is “a perfect or mature man.”

3. UNTO A PERFECT MAN.

The Church has to mature to complete manhood in understanding, holiness, character, power and obedience. These are the essential features of adulthood.

We should not stop growing till we arrive at complete manhood. It is sad that believers place more emphasis on exercising spiritual gifts to meet their felt needs than on things that mature the Body of Christ.

The five-fold ministry is under pressure to multiply bread, predict people's future, produce prosperity and heal the sick. Ministers who dwell on the kinds of ministry that promise material and emotional benefit to believers receive more attention than those who minister to make the Body of Christ mature.

The apostle Paul underscored the imperfection of exercising spiritual gifts and indicated that they would pass away when that which is perfect comes.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

1 Corinthians 13:8-11

The word "perfect" in the above verse means the same thing as "perfect" in Ephesians 4:13. It means "full age." The apostle is emphasising the fact that at a certain mature age in Christ, spiritual gifts and knowledge will give way to complete manhood in Christ. A weak church seeks to demonstrate spiritual gifts at the expense of spiritual maturity. Miracles are good and spiritual gifts are to be desired but they should not be the ultimate goals of the Church.

Baby believers speak, understand and think like children. They discuss subjects that are of interest to children, understand only the things that appeal to the human intellect and think about things that give them temporary satisfaction. Believers who attain the standard of complete manhood speak about the mysteries of Christ, understand spiritual things and think about eternal things.

Mature believers are not children who are tossed to and fro by different doctrines and the cunning craftiness of men. They don't run around looking for false doctrines and spiritual experiences to satisfy their flesh. Miracles, signs and wonders don't consume mature believers. They place more emphasis on the things that benefit them spiritually than physically.

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried

about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Ephesians 4:14

Solid churches have members who are settled. They are not transient. One of the greatest challenges pastors have is seeing their members drift away to other churches in search of what they call “good word” and miracles. Such members are insensitive to their pastors and other members of the church. They don’t care who they hurt or offend on their way out.

The Body of Christ must mature into manhood until it attains the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We should refuse to accept the lie of the devil that this state of maturity cannot be attained. The progress of spiritual growth should be sustained until Christ is fully represented by the Church.

4. UNTO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST.

Our maturity will reach the climax of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is the ultimate goal of the Church. This goal includes attaining unto His holiness and power. It elevates us to reign with Him as kings, share in His office as the High Priest and participate in His prophetic office.

Believers are already priests and kings in Christ on the earth. We are a royal priesthood.

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

1 Peter 2:9

In eternity, when perfection or full maturity is attained, our kingship and priesthood in Christ will reach its climax.

5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:5-6

Every blessing and status we have in Christ in this life is just a foretaste of

what is to come.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

1 Corinthians 13:12-13

The Church has to be built till it attains the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Many well-meaning believers have argued that it is impossible for believers to be like Jesus Christ on earth. They contend that He was perfect in purity and power because He was the infallible Son of God. The Scriptures however make it clear that though Jesus was the Son of God, He depended on the Holy Ghost and the Word of God to please the Father in all things. The apostle Paul admonished the Colossians to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Colossians 1:10

It is possible to please God in all things like Jesus Christ did. The word “walk” in the above verse is the Greek word **peripateō**, which means “to tread all around” and “to be occupied with.” The word “worthy” is **axiōs** which means “after a godly sort” or “comparable.” When we put the two words together we derive the understanding that to “walk worthy” means to live a godly life that measures the full distance of Jesus’ life of obedience and occupies the full volume of His love. The apostle Paul set this target before the Colossians because it was possible to attain it. Believers can walk as Jesus Christ walked on earth.

We are to live in the world, as Christ is in heaven.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

1 John 4:17

The effort of the Church to attain Jesus Christ’s stature should be sustained. There should be no break in our commitment to be like Christ. We must not be distracted from this goal. Anything, which draws us away from this target, should be resisted. We cannot grow weary in our effort to be like Jesus Christ.

“**TILL** ” points us to the ultimate goal we should look forward to. Many churches and their branches have the wrong goal in view. They have a distorted view of the future state and this has disoriented them in belief and in ministry. If we get our goal right, our actions will be right and our churches will be solid.

To attain this ultimate goal and to build solid churches the believers in the Body of Christ must grow together. In the next chapter, we will look at the importance of growing together and how to do that. God has designed the Body of Christ to grow together. Anything other than this leads to confusion and stunted growth. There is joy in growing together as a body.

CHAPTER SIX

GROWING TOGETHER

Growing together is an effective way to build a solid church and attain the ultimate goal of maturing unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The Body of Christ must grow up together as a unit. It is frustrating and fruitless when some parts of the Body grow up and others don't. The Church should not be made up of children who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.

*14 That **we henceforth be no more children** , tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

*15 But speaking the truth in love, **may grow up into him in all things**, which is the head, even Christ:*

*16 From whom **the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth** , according to **the effectual working** in the measure of **every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itse in love** .*

Ephesians 4:14-16 (emphasis mine)

The apostle Paul used the pronoun “we” which is the first person plural in reference to the subject. He was talking about everybody and not just a few people. It is not “I”, “you” or “they” but “we.” All of us have to work hard in the Spirit not to be children. We must grow up together into Him in all things.

Growing up is the process by which the Body of Christ increases in wisdom, strength, holiness, power and grace. The Church cannot fulfil its purpose on earth without growing up. Growing up is the gateway to greatness.

The manner in which we have to grow up is demonstrated by the growth of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was on earth. Though He was God manifested in the flesh, He grew up to set an example for us. Being born again does not exclude us from growing up. The infilling of the Holy Ghost is not a substitute for spiritual growth. If Jesus had to increase in stature, we have to do likewise and we must do it together.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

The failure of an individual or a local church to grow affects other members of the body. When a part of the body does not function well other parts suffer. The growth of an individual or church enhances the functioning of other parts of the body. This is why it is imperative for us to grow together. It is selfish to see yourself as an independent entity who can choose to grow or refuse to do so.

Growth should be holistic in order to be effective. It is unhealthy to grow in some aspects of life and refuse to grow in others. A solid church is one that grows in every dimension that is essential to the fulfilment of Christ's purpose on earth. We are to "grow up into him in all things" and not in some things.

FIVE IMPORTANT AREAS OF GROWTH

It is disadvantageous for a church to grow in some areas and not in others. The ideal way to grow is to do so together in every aspect of life. A brief look at some key areas of Church growth will help us build solid churches.

1. Growth (maturity) in the knowledge of Christ.

The Church is required to increase in the Knowledge of Christ. This is the first area of growth we should seek to attain. A believer who wants to bask in glory, must do so only in the fact that he or she knows the Lord and is increasing in that knowledge. We are not to glory in material and fleshly things.

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

The main purpose of the Holy Ghost on earth is to testify about Jesus Christ. As He testifies about Jesus Christ to us, we are to also bear witness of Him to the world.

26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

John 15:26-27

The Church talks too little about Jesus Christ today. We mention His name just to punctuate our prayers, with the aim of receiving our desires from God. Jesus Christ should be preached and taught in the Church as the main subject. The knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ produces the ever-increasing fruit of character in believers.

2. Growth (maturity) in character.

Believers must grow in character. We must add character to knowledge. It is a cumulative exercise. Maturity is an all round development of spiritual virtue. Don't specialise in having some character traits while you neglect others. The apostle Peter urges believers to be diligent to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity. This is the evidence that we are not barren or unfruitful.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:5-8

The various elements of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 give us another version of the list of character traits believers must bear to glorify God and influence the world.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Materialism and greed drive misguided folk in the Church to form ministries

and local churches. They literally call themselves into the ministry and use human charisma and deceptive means to draw a following after themselves. Such individuals lack patience and self-control. They seek their personal interest above the interest of the group. Solid churches don't suffer random splits because the unbridled desire of individuals to be called the founders and general overseers of their own churches is curtailed. Weak churches develop disturbing cracks and divisions because of the absence of character.

Bearing the fruit of character is a good thing but to fully edify the Body of Christ and accomplish the purpose of Christ on earth, character must be combined with the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit demonstrate the power of God in the Church and through it. A solid church is rich in character and strong in power.

3. Growth (maturity) in the gifts of the Spirit.

A church cannot be said to be solid unless it is strong in power. The gifts of the Spirit are the means through which the needs of the Church and the world are met. They are the weapons with which the Church subdues satan and his kingdom. Solid churches encourage the exercising of spiritual gifts. God equips believers with these gifts to enable them minister to one another.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Nine spiritual gifts are listed above, namely the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. These gifts are not the reserve of pastors but the entire Body of Christ. Some churches resist the operation of these gifts while others limit them to ordained pastors alone. Solid churches however, release all believers to exercise the gifts

of the Spirit.

The purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is to minister to the Body of Christ and the world. The gifts of the Spirit build our patience, self-control, joy, peace and other virtues because they make it easy for us to trust God. These gifts also impart healing and deliverance to believers. Signs and wonders demonstrate the power of God to the world and bring sinners to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. A solid church abounds in the gifts of the Spirit. The Bible warns us against quenching the Spirit.

19 Quench not the Spirit.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-20

Believers are called to minister to other believers in the Body of Christ and to the world with their character and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. We are to grow in our ability to minister to the Body of Christ and the world. People in the secular world improve their skills and character so as to make impact on the world and serve humanity. It is important for the Church to grow in its ability to minister to the world and solve the numerous problems around us.

4. Growth (maturity) in ministering to the Body of Christ and the world.

The Church is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We are in the world for the purpose of providing solutions to problems and bringing about transformation. We do these things through spiritual avenues and physical acts of intervention. Believers minister to the Body of Christ and the world at different levels. God gives us big or small responsibilities depending on our levels of maturity.

Those who have big faith and have prepared themselves through fasting and prayer are entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with bigger demonic problems. For example, Jesus Christ who was spiritually stronger than His disciples cast out a demon, they could not deal with.

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation,

how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Matthew 17:14-21

Jesus Christ's disciples asked Him why they could not cast the demons out of the boy. Jesus responded that it was because of their unbelief. He coached them to use fasting and prayer as the weapon to dislodge demons. The disciples were not spiritually developed enough to handle the challenge at hand.

Spiritual growth qualifies us to handle bigger spiritual responsibilities. Physical growth involves developing requisite skills and acquiring equipment, technology and resources to handle greater assignments. The Word of God stipulates that one has to grow in order to handle responsibilities.

1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

Galatians 4:1-3

Until an heir grows up, he or she is a servant under tutors and governors. Those who refuse to grow are not only denied greater responsibilities but are servants under the tyranny of oppressors. This explains why we see many believers around who are the servants of unbelievers and demons.

Apart from the spiritual areas of growth we have discussed above, the physical aspects of church growth are crucial to the impact a solid church makes. It is unhealthy to limit growth to spiritual things.

5. Growth (maturity) in physical and material stature.

The numerical strength of a church is relevant to its ability to influence society. The truth of the matter is that numbers affect the attention people pay to a church. Financial power and social status have effects on the ability of the Church to make impact. The early Church was both spiritually strong and materially resourced.

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Acts 4:32-35

God does not starve the Body of Christ of material resources. Finances and material resources are not enemies of the Kingdom of God but allies. It is wrong to equate material things with worldliness. The tendency of believers to shy away from the things they label as worldly accounts for the multiplied cases of weak churches around the world. We are not adequately represented on the world stage to combat the problems that face humanity on a daily basis.

The areas of growth we have considered empower the church to realise its objective of fulfilling the Great Commission. It is important for us to understand the reason we must grow individually in the Body of Christ.

REASONS FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH

No one lives by himself or herself in the Body of Christ. Your growth affects someone else and your failure to grow also affects someone. The body can only increase if every part of it is growing. Your head cannot refuse to grow when your legs are growing. Your shoulders don't grow without a corresponding growth of your neck. You will look funny if your eyeballs grow without the accompanying increase of the eye socket.

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:16

It is selfish not to grow. One who refuses to grow causes an entire system great discomfort. From Ephesians 4:16 there are four reasons why you must grow in the church.

To fit into the body.

The apostle Paul described the Body of Christ as being “*fitly joined together and compacted.*” When every part of the body grows and fits in, there is easy movement and effective coordination. The growth of every part reduces pain and discomfort in the body. Efficiency in function and stability of the body are enhanced as we grow individually and fit into one another. It is good to grow up because it qualifies you to fit into others.

To contribute to the body.

It is exciting to be in a body and contribute to its wellbeing. Ephesians 4:16 says, “*Every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,*” . What we contribute to the body must be in good quantity and of good quality. Failure to grow denies you the power to enjoy the satisfaction that comes from making meaningful contribution to the system.

To increase the body.

You should not contribute to the body for selfish reasons.

Don’t seek your own interest but that of others. Your contribution “maketh increase of the body” and not just yourself. The growth of a part of the body determines the growth of another part. Your growth enables you to make contributions that increase others. Your increase brings increase to another person. When you go up, someone goes up. You win for others and you lose for others.

To edify the body in love.

The order of involvement in a system is clearly set out in Ephesians 4:16. You fit in first, then you contribute to the system and through this you increase it. This combined effect is called the edification of the body. You fit into the body, contribute to it and increase it, for “the edifying of itself in love.” To edify is to

build the body in the architectural sense. We must grow in order to say and do the things that build up the body. Failure to grow makes us children who destroy the body instead of building it. The Body of Christ is edified when we contribute to it and increase it in love. There can be no increase and edification without love.

The failure of many believers to grow up is a great setback to the Body of Christ. This failure slows down the rate of increase and edification of the Church. Another bad effect of this setback is that when genuine believers refuse to grow, false believers infiltrate the Church and occupy the space the former are supposed to fit in. These false believers are the tares Jesus Christ talked about. The reason tares grow is that some real plants fail to grow together with the rest. While you refuse to grow tares grow in your place.

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matthew 13:24-30

If the genuine believers in a church don't grow together, tares grow among them. Strange people position themselves in strategic places and strangle the legitimate ones when the latter fail to make any impact. While genuine churches and believers refuse to fulfil their prophetic roles, tares take advantage of the existing vacuum. False churches and preachers are in strategic places like politics, education and business because the good ones shy away from their responsibilities. Failure or refusal to grow makes you a dependent, a distraction and a drain. A ministry with many parts that don't grow is weak but one with every part growing is solid.

The standard God has set for a solid church is high and the means to attain that standard is not easy. You can easily get discouraged and rule out the possibility of building a solid church. It is encouraging to know that Jesus promised to build His Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. It is His responsibility to build His Church and not ours.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

Jesus declared His commitment to build His Church. His emphatic declaration means that it is not man's responsibility to build the Church. God uses men and women to build the Church but they are not the force behind it. This fact must be entrenched in our understanding.

In 2009, I resigned my position as the chairman of the International Presbytery of the Fountain Gate Chapel, a ministry I founded in 1987. I thought it wise to step down and let the ministry elect a new chairman to lead us. I arrived at my decision after nearly seven years of prayer. Our ministry like many others, was built on one man's instincts. Most of the pastors might have had a feeling that they were working for me instead of the Lord. I also acted like “the big boss,” though sometimes unconsciously.

My decision to resign my position did not sit well with the leaders of some other churches who thought I was setting a bad precedence for younger pastors to expect their founders to step down. I am the first person to admit that this step may not be a good idea for all ministries. In our situation, I was convinced we had trustworthy leaders who could take over from me without rocking the boat.

Some of the ministers of our own ministry felt I had let them down. They had a notion that I was the covering of the church and by stepping down I was denying the ministry a covering. I disagree with this extreme concept of spiritual covering currently being taught in the Body of Christ. I don't think the covering of a church is a human being. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church.

Our ministry was personality-based but stepping down moved us towards a principle-based ministry, which is more stable than the former. It is ideal to have one leader and one vision in an organisation but a particular person may not have to be the head forever.

The human covering of a ministry is not necessarily someone who occupies the highest position and controls everybody. The modest view of a human covering is a leader who performs the three-fold role of ensuring the doctrinal integrity of the ministry, constantly praying for the ministry and setting the example of moral purity for others to follow in the ministry. One can play this role without being called the general overseer, which is an administrative position.

I currently serve as the senior pastor of the Desert Pastures, Fountain Gate

Chapel, Bolgatanga. I also play a spiritual role of supporting the entire ministry worldwide through teaching, training and praying for the ministers. I have nothing to do with the administration of the ministry and its finances but I make myself available to carry out assignments our current chairman invites me to perform. It is encouraging to see the progress pastors and the local churches are making under the new system.

I recommend that in some situations, especially when leadership conflicts threaten to tear a church apart, the leader could opt to step down. It is not right to let the struggle for power scatter a ministry. Giving people a sense of ownership in what they do may reduce the insecurity in them and allow them to work better for the Lord. A good number of pastors in church branches feel the founders of these churches are merely using them to build their empires. The “monetisation” of the Gospel makes matters worse in the Body of Christ. Motives have been compromised by money and purity has been exchanged for power.

The Church can only mature to perfection and be solid if we understand the headship of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, placing a disproportionate emphasis on the human leaders God sets in the Church makes it difficult for us to focus on Jesus Christ. The result of this unfortunate trend is a weak Church and a struggle to discover God’s eternal counsel for it under the rubble of human deficiencies. The failings of human leaders derail believers because they see them as the ultimate heads of the Church.

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Gideon’s attitude in the Old Testament cautions us not to exalt the leaders God raises among us beyond measure. The people of Israel asked Gideon to rule over them but he declined by reminding them that God was their ruler. Church leaders must allow Jesus to be the head of His Church.

22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

Judges 8:22-23

Human beings are not the builders and heads of the Church – Jesus said “I will build my church.” He has no intention of relinquishing this responsibility to anyone else.

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:16 -19

The word to “build” is taken from the Greek word ***oikodomeō***, which means to “construct”, “embolden”, “confirm” and “edify.” The above Scripture reference shows that Jesus Christ is the rock on which the Church is built. He is not only the head of the Church but also the foundation on which it is built.

Some people confuse the context of Matthew 16:18 by saying Jesus Christ built the Church on Peter as the rock. A careful examination of the Scripture shows that the Church is built on the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus told Peter he was “Peter”. The Greek word for “Peter” is ***petros*** meaning a stone or a piece of rock. Jesus Christ did not say He will build His Church on ***petros*** but on “this rock.” The Greek word for “rock” is ***petra*** which means a rock or mass of rock. Jesus Christ is the rock on which the Church is built. The preaching of the revelation that He is the Son of the living God is the foundation of the Christian doctrine.

The apostle Paul described Jesus Christ as the chief corner stone.

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Ephesians 2:20

Jesus Christ is the only foundation on which the Church is built.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11

The prophet Isaiah referred to Jesus Christ as a foundation stone, tried stone, precious corner stone and sure foundation.

16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Isaiah 28:16

A solid church is built on Jesus Christ as the rock and not a human leader. The revelation that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God should form the foundation of all preaching and teaching in a church.

The Church is a deliberate act of construction by God. It is as firm as a solid ground and as dependable as a pillar. The apostle Paul told Timothy the Church is the pillar and ground of truth.

15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

1 Timothy 3:15-16

The truth of the revelation of Christ is that He is God manifested in the flesh. Flesh and blood do not reveal this truth to man but the Father in heaven. The Father has established this revelation as the basis for salvation.

Every believer whom God has chosen to be part of the Body of Christ – through the exercising of his or her personal faith – is a choice stone. We have unique qualities that are given to us by the Holy Ghost through the new birth. God uses us as lively stones to build the superstructure of the spiritual house, Jesus Christ being the Chief Cornerstone.

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

None of us called ourselves into the Kingdom. You don't determine who else comes into the Kingdom of God just as you don't choose who becomes your brother or sister in an earthly family. This knowledge should make us honour others in the Body of Christ and be thankful to God for choosing them.

The lively stones God has placed in the spiritual house – the Church – must not corrupt themselves. God lays the foundation of Christ in everybody's life but He uses men and women to add to that foundation. Those who come into the Body of Christ are the building blocks in the Body of Christ. We should be diligent to ensure that our lives constitute gold and other precious building materials. God judges acts of negligence and misconduct on our part that lead to the incorporation of inferior materials in the spiritual house.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

The process of building the Church is not a light exercise of assembling building units. Jesus Christ is the builder of the Church. He builds it with lively stones and not cardboard. The Church Jesus Christ is building has several great qualities. Bear in mind that the building units are lively stones. One of the qualities of the Church is that it is a formidable structure that cannot be easily destroyed. Jesus said the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church.

FORTIFIED AGAINST THE GATES OF HELL

The Church is fortified against the gates of hell. In His disclosure of how He would build His Church, the Lord made it obvious that the gates of hell will

assault the Church but in vain. The “gates of hell” are a combination of the acts of resistance and assault by the kingdom of darkness. The building of the Church is not a recreational exercise but warfare.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18

The machinations and powers of the invisible world shall not prevail against the Church. The “gates of hell” refers to the entrance of the unseen world or the entrance of hades. In the ancient fortified cities, gates were places where council meetings were held for judicial and other issues. They were also the places out of which armies marched forth to battle. Jesus made reference to the fact that no strategies devised at the gates of hell and armies of darkness coming through the gates of the kingdom of darkness will prevail against the Church. The Church constantly contends against the forces of death and hell but they are vanquished forces.

It is exciting to know that the Church is not on the defensive but on the offensive. We don't sit back and wait for the enemy to attack us but we are constantly attacking the gates of hell. Jesus Christ has the keys of hell and death. He has the power to stop death and restrain hell.

18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Revelation 1:18

A solid church is informed and instructed in spiritual warfare. Churches die and believers are destroyed when they are ignorant about the devices of the enemy. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. These principalities and powers are the gatekeepers of hell.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be

able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

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

Ephesians 6:10-18

The apostle Paul calls on the Church to be strong in the Lord. He directs us to put on the whole armour of God and not part of it. Prayer is the means by which we put on the armour of God. A prayerless church or believer cannot stand.

Our ministry in Bolgatanga has had its fair share of the attack and resistance of the gates of hell. In 1988, a group of people from a nearby village attacked and vandalised our place of worship. They came in with cudgels, bows and arrows, cutlasses and other weapons and created chaos during a service. Seats were overturned and worshippers were heckled and hurled out of the hall. The thugs claimed our noisy prayers drove away the gods of the land and we had to be silenced. We are not the only victims of such acts of vandalism. Recently, local government officials in the national capital city of Ghana, Accra, demolished a church building under the pretext that it was noisy. I asked one high ranking Muslim government official whether he thought such an act could have been carried out on a mosque of the Muslims. His response was as good as your guess – he said no one would dare do that.

Acts of witchcraft and wickedness are unleashed against the Church. Hatred burns in the hearts of satanic agents against the Body of Christ. Lies are fabricated from the pit of hell to discredit men and women of God. Mischievous people fight against preachers with the aim of annihilating them but Jesus Christ assured His followers that the gates of hell would not prevail against them. No weapon formed against you shall prosper.

17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the

heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 54:17

We must use our tongues to condemn the weapons satan unleashes against the Church. Jesus Christ has given us the weapon of the Word – the two-edged sword – to fight against satan’s attacks. We are instructed to condemn every tongue that rises up against us. Prayer is the means by which we contend with the agents of darkness. The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

We are in partnership with Jesus Christ in the war against hell. Jesus’ commitment to build the Church does not mean we should stand idly by and allow the devil to have a field day in the Church. Jesus builds the Church by giving us access to the throne of grace and the platform of empowerment through prayer. The apostle Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for him and his team to be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

After the completion and dedication of our church building in Bolgatanga, an uncle of mine who is an animist approached me and expressed his surprise

that I had finished building the church and was unscathed. He said “ My son you are really a man. It is amazing you have completed this building and you are still alive and healthy.” I asked him what he meant by his statement and he said they live in the land and know what goes on in the realm of darkness. What he was implying was that there were evil forces and men who won’t allow someone to live if he or she undertakes a venture like building churches. He did not know that Jesus said “I will build my church.”

God is the builder of the Church. This guarantees that it will endure forever. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. Whatever God does abides forever.

14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

The Church does not exist on earth just to resist the gates of hell but to release heaven’s blessings unto the earth. Jesus Christ said the Church has the power to bind and to loose. By binding and loosing, the Church guarantees its continuance and regulates the inflow of blessings to the earth. A solid church is impregnable against satanic assault and is strategic in releasing heavenly grace to the world.

Having considered the quality of the fortitude of the Church Jesus is building, let us look at the level of its empowerment for the execution of the Great Commission. Jesus Christ gave Peter and the disciples the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. From the beginning of the New Testament Church, we have been adequately equipped and empowered to precipitate the will of God on earth.

ENDOWED TO EXECUTE THE GREAT COMMISSION

We have the keys to unlock the doors that hold the blessings of salvation and deliverance. With the keys of the Kingdom of heaven we release the blessings of God upon the world and restrain evil from coming in. Whatsoever we bind on earth is bound in heaven and whatsoever we loose on earth is loosed in heaven.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:19

The Church has the keys to determine what happens on earth. We have the mandate and authority to disciple the world and lead people to the throne of grace. We are not operating illegally, neither are we ill equipped for the task. Jesus received “all power” in heaven and on earth and has in turn delegated us to teach all nations.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20

By teaching all nations to observe Jesus’ commandments, we lead them to be blessed with the blessings that accompany obedience. Jesus told the disciples to “go ye therefore” because they were endowed with all heavenly blessings to send the grace of God to the nations of the world. They were endowed with the power to legislate in the affairs of men on earth. The Great Commission does not only win souls for heaven but changes people’s lives on earth.

Philip the Evangelist broke the cloud of darkness over the land of Samaria and freed the people from the fear Simon the Sorcerer had put in them. The people received the Gospel and its attendant breakthrough of freedom and joy.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying,

This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Acts 8:5-13

Many parts of the world are under the control of satanic agents and forces of darkness. Military personnel and scientific means cannot dislodge these forces. We have the power to disperse fear and release joy into the atmosphere. Philip carried the blessing of the Gospel to Samaria. Many communities resist the Gospel and preachers because they don't know the blessings and peace the Gospel brings. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is glad tidings. It is not bad news. The carriers of the Gospel have beautiful feet and not destructive feet.

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

18 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Romans 10:15-18

Preachers of the Gospel go everywhere with glad tidings because they know the power of the Gospel. They are aware that they are the carriers of blessings. The apostle Paul said the Church is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. We were chosen before the foundation of the world to bless the world and saturate it with holiness and love.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Ephesians 1:3-4

Grace and peace are multiplied to the Body of Christ to make it the storehouse of God's power and blessings. God has called us to glory and virtue so the world can receive the impartation of light and glory.

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

2 Peter 1:2-4

The peace we see in the world is the result of the presence of the Church. If the Church is removed from the earth total chaos will result. We are indeed the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The Great Commission transforms the land. The Gospel makes people heavenly minded and empowers them to change the world. The world refuses to recognise the peace and blessings the Church brings to it. Unbelievers are so dishonest and blinded that no matter what the Church does they attribute the blessings and prosperity to other things. The world denies the fact that transformed lives have a direct impact on the physical development in the land.

A solid church is a place of hope. It is the house of mercy to which the afflicted run and take refuge. Unfortunately a lot of people battered by the world enter the church only for their situation to be made worse either because we attribute all their problems to their own sins or curses. Some may even be told that in order for all their problems to be solved, they need to pay some money but often these are poor people looking for the comfort of the Spirit.

The Church is God's representative on earth that has the power to release His blessings. If this is done faithfully, people respond with their tithes and offerings in the spirit of joy because they see "the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." We must fulfil our prophetic role with grace. Jesus Christ has given us the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. These keys are the devices or instruments by which the doors of blessing and grace are opened or shut. In the next chapter, we will look at some of the keys Jesus Christ has given the Church

to influence the world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

The Church is not a weak organism on earth but a powerful agent of change and transformation. Jesus Christ gave the Church the keys of the Kingdom of heaven to transform the world. A key stands for the possibility and ability to unlock a closed territory. It is the tool to have access to a realm. The keys of the Kingdom of heaven refer to the spiritual tools, devices and means by which the power and glory of heaven are released unto the earth.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:19

A number of keys are available to the Church to execute the Great Commission. These keys are powerful tools for the execution of God's agenda on earth. A solid church is equipped with these keys and actively employs them to change lives. We shall consider them briefly as we seek to employ them to transform human lives and change the world. Only spiritual people can appreciate these keys because the natural mind cannot appreciate their significance.

There is a wide range of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven God has made available to the Church. Knowing them empowers us to do exploits. We will now discuss some of them, the first being the cross of Jesus Christ.

1. The power of the cross.

The first key under consideration is the cross of Jesus Christ. The redemptive work of Christ on the cross is the key to salvation. The cross is the device on which Jesus was crucified. He died on it and was buried in the tomb, after which He resurrected on the third day. Through His death on the cross Jesus paid the full penalty for the sins of the world and obtained redemption for us. Man cannot pay for his sins with his own works. The cross of Christ should be our emphasis and not human wisdom. It is the power of God to those who are saved.

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but

unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

God reconciled sinners unto Himself and reconciled the Jews with Gentiles in one Body through the power of the cross. A church can only be united when the message of the cross is emphasised. Peace between the Church and the world is secured through the cross as sinners get converted and are integrated into the Church.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Ephesians 2:14-16

The message of the cross is so simple that backslidden believers substitute it with supposedly more sophisticated revelations. It is almost as if the cross of Christ did not cross into this modern era with the Church.

Another key of the Kingdom of heaven is the name of Jesus. It is a key you constantly hear from the lips of believers and yet they don't fully appreciate its power.

2. The power of the name of Jesus.

The name of Jesus is the title God the Father conferred on Jesus Christ after He had died on the cross, broken the chains of sin, death and hell, risen from the dead, received power and authority from on high, ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the throne of God. By these feats He obtained a name that is above every name. Principalities and powers bow at the mention of this name. Obedience earned Jesus His superior name.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

The names of preachers and churches are not the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the name of Jesus that opens the door to salvation, miracles and blessings. Human names are lame and their personalities sometimes constitute pests in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus told His disciples to cast out devils in His name. Demons don't tremble at the names of denominations and preachers but at the name of Jesus Christ.

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Mark 16:15-18

The apostle Peter unleashed the power in the name of Jesus to raise the cripple at the gate of the Temple called "Beautiful" after the Upper Room encounter with the Holy Ghost.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Acts 3:6-8

Peter testified that there is no salvation in any name except the name of Jesus Christ. The unbelief and scepticism of the religious leaders of His day did not shake his faith in the name of Jesus. It is sad to hear respected preachers today create the impression that people can be saved through other ways. They make it look like any religion is okay if only the people are “good.”

10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 4:10-12

The philosophies of men make incessant attempts to counteract the claims of the Church that Jesus is the only way to heaven. The Church cannot compromise on the power of the name of Jesus and His declaration that He is the way, the truth and the life.

The name of Jesus is closely related to the power of the Holy Ghost. These two keys are used together to release miracles and divine interventions. The name of Jesus gives us access to the Holy Ghost and the Word of God.

3. The power of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus Christ promised the early apostles that they would receive the power of the Holy Ghost to be witnesses unto Him throughout the world. The presence of the Holy Ghost is a great gift Jesus Christ gave the Church after His ascension into heaven. The Holy Ghost makes available to the Body of Christ the charisma of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1:8

The apostle Paul ministered to those God assigned him to through the manifestation of several “elements of grace.” The power of the Holy Ghost is

included in a long list of the “elements of grace” Paul employed for effective ministry.

4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

2 Corinthians 6:4-7

The power of the Holy Ghost is made of His charisma and fruit. The charisma of the Holy Ghost is the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost for the edification of the Church and the release of divine acts of intervention. The fruit of the Spirit refers to the character of the Holy Ghost that is produced in believers as they become partakers of God’s divine nature.

The charisma and fruit of the Holy Ghost combine to make the Body of Christ the true witness of Christ on earth. The miracles that come from the charisma of the Spirit produce faith in unbelievers towards Jesus Christ and the fruit of the Spirit in the saints leads unbelievers to repentance. For example, the charisma of healing the sick convinces unbelievers that Jesus is alive and the fruit of being kind or generous makes them know that the love of God is real. Unbelievers turn to Christ when they know that the Christian life is better than the kind of life they live.

The Spirit and the Word are inseparable keys in spiritual matters. The Spirit without the Word is idle because the former uses the latter as the agent of creation, warfare and transformation. Jesus Christ has equipped the Church with the Word of God. When the Word is released heaven responds to man’s faith on earth.

4. The power of the Word of God.

The preaching and teaching of the Word of God is a major key for establishing the Church. The apostles of the early Church were dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. They refused to allow other pressures of ministry to distract them.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:2-4

The Word of God increased rapidly when it was sown in the hearts of multitudes. The apostles spread the Word of God and turned many from darkness to light.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:7

The preaching and teaching of the Word of God releases the power of heaven unto the earth. Preaching is the proclamation of the Gospel while teaching is the impartation of the in-depth revelation of God's Word. To build a solid church, we must not allow our personal experiences to have a negative influence on the truth we preach and teach. Popular and current trends threaten to root out what we preach and teach – we must be careful not to develop itching ears.

The Body of Christ must endeavour to live the Word we preach. The Word of God must be demonstrated in our walk. This is how we turn the world from darkness to light. The early apostles were so devoted to the ministry of the Word of God that those they preached it to, did not receive it as the word of men but as the Word of God.

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

The Spirit and Word are keys of the Kingdom that operate together to establish the will of God on earth. These two however, need the medium of

prayer to be effective. You cannot receive and minister the Word or walk in the power of the Spirit without prayer. Prayer positions you to receive the Word and the Spirit. It also empowers you to use the Word and the gifts of the Spirit effectively.

5. The power of prayer.

The apostle Peter and the early apostles showed that prayer and the Word are inseparable by committing themselves continually to both prayer and the ministry of the Word. They did not commit themselves only to the ministry of the Word but also to prayer.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:2-4

Prayer influences life in the Word as well as life in the Spirit. The early apostles prayed and were filled with the Holy Ghost. God has arranged the order of spiritual activity in such a way that the outpouring of the Spirit follows prayer.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:31

Jesus demonstrated the connection between prayer and the Spirit when He told His disciples that He would pray to the Father so He would send the Spirit. The Spirit did not just come – He came in answer to Jesus’ prayer. The reason for the spiritual dryness of the Church is the absence of prayer. Prayer always releases the Spirit.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with

you, and shall be in you.

John 14:16-17

The Holy Ghost, the Word of God and the atmosphere of prayer release faith and other spiritual virtues that establish the Church and unleash the power of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

6. The power of faith.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence of the things we don't see. The book of Hebrews says the elders obtained a good report through faith. We cannot obtain a good report by any other means – faith is the only thing that moves God to do things in our favour. The difference between worldly people and believers is faith.

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Hebrews 11:1-3

The Bible says it is impossible to please God without faith. Believers must believe that God is all-powerful and faithful to reward those who diligently seek Him. Faith is a heavenly gift that cannot be generated in the natural human heart.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

Jesus Christ used faith as one of the devices of the Kingdom of Heaven. He exercised great faith when He walked the earth. He also taught extensively about faith. Jesus made it imperative for His followers to have faith. It was a condition for them to receive healing and the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven.

21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Mark 11:21-24

The just live by faith. Without faith spiritual life ceases to exist. No one can be righteous without faith. We cannot receive the forgiveness of sin without faith. Eternal life cannot be comprehended or received without faith.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:16-17

Faith is often accompanied by wisdom to produce enduring and sustained results. Churches that exercise great faith but lack wisdom lose what their faith produces with time. Wisdom gives longevity to the products of faith.

7. The power of wisdom.

Wisdom is the application of divine knowledge and insight to situations in a manner that produces results, which glorify God. Wisdom establishes the kingdom of God and executes God's salvation plan for mankind. The wisdom of God is different from worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom leads to evil and destruction but godly wisdom produces spiritual fruit and establishes the Kingdom of God.

Believers should speak the wisdom of God and not worldly wisdom. The wisdom of God is hidden but it is accessible to the Church.

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

1 Corinthians 2:6-7

The Church is built through the acquisition and application of wisdom. It is established by understanding and filled with good things through knowledge. We cannot neglect the role of wisdom in spiritual things. Spiritual warfare requires wisdom for victory. Faith and power are not always enough to win the war against the forces of darkness.

3 Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:

4 And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

5 A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.

6 For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Proverbs 24:3-6

Faith and wisdom are supernatural keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, which work on earth to release heavenly power. Their influence is however, of no avail without the involvement of the greatest key for spiritual conquest, which is love. Love is the more excellent way. It is higher than both faith and wisdom.

8. The power of love.

Love is the unconditional act of grace by which God gave His only begotten Son to save the world from sin and bondage. It is the disposition of the believer to give to the undeserving person to the point of being willing to lay down his or her life. Love is the manifestation of selflessness and generosity. The apostle Paul elevated love above the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

The long list of spiritual virtues (elements of grace) by which the apostles of the early Church ministered to the world, included unfeigned love. Pretentious love is one of the main reasons for the weakness of the modern day Church.

4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

9 As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

Love overcomes hatred and unbelief. It unlocks the treasures of God's goodness to man. We are the stewards of God's gifts to humankind. Love moves us to release the things under our stewardship to bless others. It unlocks our hearts to have the will to do good to those around us. Without the unlocking of the human heart there can be no unlocking of heaven. Love paves the way for favour to flow into people's lives.

Favour is an offshoot of love. It is a key to the Kingdom of Heaven because through it God chooses whom He admits into His presence and gives blessings.

9. The power of favour.

Favour is a major key to the Kingdom of Heaven. Favour is that which God and men give us regardless of our effort. There are opportunities and blessings we receive in life for which we don't labour or ask.

We have a task to attain the stature God expects of us but it is difficult if not impossible to do this in our own strength. Even Jesus needed favour as He increased in wisdom and stature – He had favour with God and man.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Luke 2:52

To fulfil His mission on earth, Jesus Christ increased in wisdom and stature and had favour with God and man. Wisdom and stature can take us only to a certain point in life. To get to some heights requires favour. The early Church grew rapidly partly because they had favour with the people.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Acts 2:42-47

Some churches grow mainly because they have favour with the people and not because of any acts of ministry like preaching and prayer. Prayer, holiness, pastoral care, provision of social services, publicity and financial ability are all important for church growth but none of these can give a certain kind of explosive church growth without favour.

Favour leads to increase in numbers as people readily respond to the Church and become members of the Body of Christ. The divine force of favour reduces

the amount of resistance the Church faces, thus making it easier for it to make impact. Favour results in answered prayer. It moves people to give the Church the resources it needs to carry out the Great Commission. Favour creates wealth for the Church.

10. The power of wealth.

The *Oxford English dictionary* defines wealth as the abundance of valuable possessions or money. It is a plentiful supply of a desirable thing. It is the state of being rich or prosperous. The word “wealth” is derived from the old English word “weal” which means something that is best for someone or something. Wealth implies a state of “wellbeing” or “health.” It is not evil to have wealth.

Wealth is the supply of the material and physical things, which are necessary to give expression to the Kingdom of God. Moses reminded the people of Israel that God gave them wealth to establish His covenant with them. Wealth is a sign of the covenant – it suggests that God rules in our affairs and cares for us. It is a means through which God’s covenant is established. God uses wealth to confirm His covenant with His people.

18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:18

Churches need money and other resources to build places of worship, schools, hospitals, offices and other structures. Many years ago, when churches entertained poverty as a special guest, it took over twenty years to build a little church building. Today, they are able to do so within shorter time intervals. Moses demanded gold, silver, wood and other materials for the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

20 And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses.

21 And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD’S offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments.

22 And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto

the LORD.

Exodus 35:20-22

In the Church, wealth is not an affluent display of luxury but having the necessary financial and physical resources to fulfil our earthly mandate. In the early Church, individuals made money and other resources available to the Church to take care of the needy. A solid church is one in which the needs of the poor are met. It also has the ability to solve practical problems in the community – the Church should be able to alleviate the suffering of the people we see around us. Poverty in the Church does not help our cause.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:34-37

It is noticeable that Barnabas sold his land and sent the proceeds to the apostles for the work of the ministry. The Church was not timid on the issue of money. The apostles did not shun money but received it to bless others and to do the work of the ministry.

The love of money is the root of evil but the lack of money is the stem of disability. The lack of money holds up disability by making us helpless in the face of challenges. The lack of money makes the needy perish. Prosperity is wrong if you allow those in need to suffer and if you live for material things as if they are ends in themselves. God is pleased if your wealth alleviates the sufferings of others. God does not mind you living well but He demands that you help others to survive.

We have considered several spiritual and physical keys that are used to unlock the mysteries and blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven. I wish to conclude the list of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven by mentioning the human gifts in the Body of Christ. The five-fold ministry comprises the human

gifts God uses as keys for the unlocking of the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven.

11. The power of the five-fold ministry.

Jesus Christ founded the Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. These two ministry gifts or offices are part of the five-fold ministry namely the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

The five-fold ministry (offices) must be discovered, developed and delivered in every church for the accomplishment of its mission. Ministers of the Gospel should be encouraged to stand in these offices and we must not shy away from referring to those God places in these offices as such.

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Ephesians 4:11-13

The five-fold ministry is a key to releasing the power of the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth. We cannot build solid churches if we think these offices ceased to exist in the Body of Christ after the days of the early apostles. These gifts are active in today's Church and any church that develops them is solid in nature and effective in function.

So far we have considered the fact that it is imperative for the Church of

today to be people-focused. This is the only way we can be relevant. To be effective in its role of bringing the impact of the Kingdom of Heaven unto the earth, the Church must be structured according to God's pattern. This structure is a system in which we have one leader with one vision. A divided house cannot stand. A solid church has one leader and one vision and operates in one Spirit. Our study pointed us to the ultimate goal we must aspire to attain – Jesus Christ. We must grow together in the stature of the fullness of Christ. The task of the Church is massive but Jesus promised to build His Church. We have explored the power of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In spite of all the great things we have discovered about how to build a solid church, the discussion will be inconclusive without a discussion on spiritual and moral purity. Holiness is indispensable to the existence of a church. The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and other issues regarding a solid church are of no value if the Church is not spiritually pure. Indeed, holiness is a key of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the next chapter, we will discuss the subject of holiness and purity under the broad title “church hygiene.”

CHAPTER NINE

CHURCH HYGIENE

Church hygiene is crucial to the state of maturity and strength of a church. The oxford dictionary defines hygiene as conditions or practices conducive to maintaining health and preventing disease, especially through cleanliness. The word is taken from the Latin and Greek words *hygieina* and *hugieinē* respectively, which means the “art of health” and “healthy.”

Church hygiene can be defined as the conditions or practices of a church that produce a state of holiness, peace, joy, unity and power, which make it triumphant in warfare and effective in ministry.

Holiness is a mark of good church hygiene. Remove holiness from a church and it becomes a social club. Without holiness no man will see the Lord.

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

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Hebrews 12:14-15

The verses of Scripture above point out that it is not an easy thing to attain the state of peace and holiness. We are to “**follow**” peace and holiness, which means we must **exert ourselves** in a certain direction to obtain them. They don’t come easily.

The opposite of a church with good hygiene is a contaminated church. A contaminated church is one that is characterised by the works of the flesh. Many churches are contaminated by sin and human tendencies that weaken them.

A church that is infested with the works of the flesh is a contaminated one. The apostle Paul listed a number of the works of the flesh in Galatians chapter five.

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

The word “works” in Galatians 5:19 means “efforts”, “occupations”, “labour” and “toils”. The works of the flesh are the “efforts, occupations and deeds” of the body and human nature. They stand for things that are carnal. Those who engage in them shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Good intentions are not

enough if we allow the works of the flesh to choke our spiritual lives.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:19-23

The list of the works of the flesh is extensive. A glance at them makes it obvious that many churches lack good hygiene because the members bear these marks instead of the fruit of the Spirit.

1. Adultery – illicit sex with a married person or by a married person.

Acts of adultery and inordinate affection involving married individuals are common among believers. Church members as well as ministers are contaminating the Church with sexual misconduct.

A few years ago, a brother had an affair with another brother's wife in a church and they left the fellowship. Their former partners in the church were embarrassed by their action and also left the church. Adultery is a taboo in many African societies. It is punishable by the culprits being ostracised from the society and sometimes being stoned or pelted with various objects. As much as these draconian methods of punishing sexual offences are not to be encouraged in the church, the Church must enforce its own kind of discipline. Church discipline is an unknown thing in most churches. We must accept the fact that though we are born again, rebuke and correction are needed to make us do the right things.

2. Fornication – harlotry, incest and other acts of sexual sin.

Fornication involves all acts, thoughts and words that involve illicit sex. Masturbation and pornography are detestable acts. Fondling is deceptive and enslaves its victims. It is dangerous to engage in acts that stimulate sexual thoughts and feelings with the belief that you will not go too far. Those acts are

sinful and could lead to worse consequences.

Some years back, premarital sex was forbidden in the Church. The story is different today. There are many reported cases of marriages with pregnancy at the time of the wedding. Pastors turn a blind eye to open cases of fornication in churches. Lustful relationships are conducted without shame. Fornication defiles the body, which is the Temple of God, and it is time we took it more seriously than we do.

The Christian call is a call to holiness. We cannot live in sin and claim to belong to the Body of Christ. The apostle Paul demanded purity from the Corinthians and stated emphatically that there was no fellowship between light and darkness.

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

The Church has to set the necessary moral standards that separate us from the world. Our speech, way of dressing and practices should be blameless. Nudity is becoming less and less offensive to a generation with a seared conscience – believers are different. We cannot defeat fornication unless we deal with it in all forms – spiritual, mental and physical.

3. Uncleaness – moral, physical or mental impurity.

Unclean thoughts pollute the human mind and spirit. They make it difficult for believers to retain the Word of God in their spirits and make the Holy Ghost move out of their lives. The unclean mind creates immoral thoughts out of nothing.

Manifestations of uncleanness torment those who open up to them. I encountered a typical example of uncleanness in a Christian sister who was delivered from a demonic condition in which she held on to a pillow and forced sexual thoughts up until she got an orgasm. Another example featured a brother who suffered from a spiritual oppression in which he undressed the opposite sex in his mind as they walked by him with their clothes on. Some believers went into fasting and prayer to set him free from the oppression.

4. Lasciviousness – licentiousness, sensuality, bestiality, wantonness and filthiness. Licentiousness includes acts of homosexuality and profanity.

These are the unthinkable sexual sins people including backslidden believers commit. A few years ago, a married Christian brother filmed an illicit sexual act he had with a woman. Some people saw the videotape later and confusion erupted in the brother's business and family. Everything around him fell apart – he lost his business and family. To commit adultery is a bad thing but to film the act yourself is unimaginable.

Some individuals suffer from “zoophilia” – the sexual desire for animals. This desire leads to bestiality – sexual intercourse with animals. Most of the reported cases of bestiality are found in unbelievers but under rare conditions some believers suffer from such sexual disorders.

5. Idolatry – image-worship, worship of false gods.

Idolatry is the worship of anything or anybody other than God. Subtle and overt forms of idolatry are entangling believers. The obsessive use of biblical symbols and tokens can lead to symbol idolatry in which people put more faith in physical objects than in the name of Jesus and the Word of God.

A brother in a church was provoked by an unbeliever due to a struggle over property. He threatened the unbeliever that he would use demonic powers from his hometown against the unbeliever. There are rumours in some circles of pastors who use demonic powers to draw crowds and money into their churches. Such activities cannot build the Church of Jesus Christ because they are ungodly practices. Believers drink potions and wear amulets from fetish priests with the hope of getting miracles. A good number of churches have been contaminated in some parts of the world.

6. Witchcraft – sorcery, magic, the use of divination for medication.

The manipulation of believers' souls through fear and intimidation is increasing in some Christian circles. Members of the Body of Christ use charms against one

another.

Several years ago, a pastor had a revelation that a member of his church who brought food to his wife was attempting to use witchcraft to abort her baby. The pastor confronted her and she confessed that the food she brought was infested with witchcraft spirits to abort the baby. She however, lied that it was some witches in her house that put the spirits into the food. After some time of prayer it was discovered that they were a group of witches who were working together to destroy the church.

7. Hatred – hostility, enmity.

Hatred is a deep and extreme dislike for someone, which makes a person act irrationally towards another person. Hatred has found its way into families, businesses and churches and is tearing them apart.

Members refuse to share pews with those they hate. One day, I asked someone in our church why she had stopped coming to church and her response was that some members had offended her. People hate one another so much that they refuse to serve in the same department in the church. Hatred leads to divorce, betrayal and violence. A sister hated her husband so much that she told me she regretted having been impregnated by him – she hated the man, the baby and herself. I tried to make her renounce her negative confessions but she would not budge.

8. Variance – quarrels, debate, strife and contention.

Arguments resulting from vain ambitions destroy the atmosphere of serenity in churches. Ministers of the Gospel and denominationalist believers attack one another verbally in the media and on the streets.

Believers in local churches refuse to speak to one another. No amount of counselling and rebuke are enough to stop them from quarrelling. One day, I was led by the Holy Ghost to call a sister to the front of a church. I then invited another sister with whom she was not on speaking terms to shake hands with her. To my surprise, the first sister I called forward refused to shake hands with the second one when she stretched out her hand.

9. Emulations – heat (zeal), fierceness and fervent mind.

Emulations are the mixture of bad feelings people harbour against one another. Unhealthy competition among churches and within them leads to confusion and conflict. Believers find it difficult to celebrate others for their success. Envy moves us to speak evil about one another.

The opposition some believers and churches face from others is almost unimaginable. I see this kind of opposition almost every month. Recently, I was told that the Sunday school teachers in our region in Ghana wanted to hold a day's training session in Bolgatanga. Our church has one of the best facilities for that kind of meeting among the Bible believing churches in the area, so a section of the leaders decided to hold the meeting there. Amazingly, some of the teachers from other churches threatened to boycott the training if it was held in our church. I had to take the decision of asking them to move the meeting away from our church. Churches in this kind of district cannot be solid, with such heated and fierce antagonism against one another.

10. Wrath – passion as if breathing hard, fierceness and indignation.

Wrath is extreme anger that can lead to murder and other acts of destruction. Churches are choked with unforgiveness and bitterness.

I witnessed the wrath of a pastor at the airport when he was trying to check in and encountered some problems. He screamed at the workers at the check-in counter and told them he was a pastor and his “anger was terrible.” I stood there wondering how a pastor could pride in the fact that his “anger is terrible.” In another episode, a pastor who had been angered by another pastor went into his office and pulled all the framed pictures he had taken with the other pastor off the wall. He screamed “I don't want to see this man's face on my walls,” as he removed the pictures. Church members display anger even in the church. A lady in a church attacked another one just after a service and accused her of having an affair with her husband. She insulted her at the top of her voice in the presence of many witnesses who tried in vain to calm her down. Her accusations were completely false and the leadership of the church had no choice but to discipline her for her actions.

11. Strife – provoking to anger and contention.

Anger and wrath lead to strife. They are expressed in feelings and words. Strife is the struggle for entitlements and positions in churches. Anger, wrath and strife are sometimes expressed in physical actions. Fistic exchanges are becoming common in congregations. Church members drag one another to court and domestic violence is on the increase.

Several years ago, a couple got angry with a pastor and marched to his house and threatened to beat him up. They insulted him publicly and called him to come out of his room for a fight. Unbelieving fellows had to come around and restrain them from beating the pastor up. In another case, a pastor's wife came to

my wife early one morning and showed us bruises her husband had inflicted on her body. The men and women who occupy the pulpit must set good examples for others to follow.

12. Seditions – dissensions, division and disunion.

Strife leads to sedition. In many churches, it is common to see deep-seated disagreements. Doctrinal differences and individual preferences make people take entrenched positions in their hearts and minds. Confused members sow seeds of discord in the assembly that make it difficult for pastors to lead the Church in one direction. Church splits are more common in this generation than in any other.

I know a church, which has affluent members who strongly disagree with the pastor's teachings on tithing. These members refuse to tithe though they are wealthy.

They contend that tithing is not a New Testament practice. They criticise the pastor openly and stir up the congregation against him. During Bible studies these controversial folks move from group to group and urge them not to follow the teaching on tithing. A church that has such members will struggle to stand on its feet.

A situation arose in a church that shocked me. The leaders accused their pastor of misappropriating funds and sought to remove him from his position. After a protracted battle, they decided to disgrace him by writing a circular, which spelt out ten offences they had attributed to him. They distributed these letters to many churches in the city by leaving them on their premises. Not satisfied with that, they called the police in to arrest him. Such acts of confusion are unhealthy for the Body of Christ. There are better ways of resolving issues in the Word of God.

13. Heresies – factions, sect and choice of a party.

Strange doctrines lead individuals and groups to form exclusive parties that teach their members to be weird in behaviour. Such parties bring their members under bondage by placing them under strict rules. They have a false righteousness that makes them think they are superior to others.

In the initial stages of our ministry, the leadership was forced to excommunicate some sisters from the ministry because of their strange prophecies and visions. They gave people personal prophecies that brought them under fear and bondage. I tried to get them to stop confusing the members but they wouldn't listen so we removed them from the church. One of them repented

many years later and came back to the church.

14. Envyings – ill will and jealousy.

In a healthy church the members rejoice at one another's success. Envy makes us undermine the good in others. If we don't appreciate the good things we have they cannot increase. Envy is the enemy of growth. Believers refuse to promote one another in churches and destroy one another's businesses out of envy. Some leaders in congregations are envious of their pastors' success and employ various schemes to destroy them.

A church had two Christian brothers who were in the same kind of business. They were both doing well in business but the older brother who was richer and more experienced was envious of the younger one. He was insecure and refused to participate in anything the younger businessman was involved in. This senior brother subsequently became bitter and backslid from the faith.

15. Murders – to slay and to slaughter.

Hatred, wrath, emulation, strife and envy lead to murder. It is hypocritical to pretend that we cannot commit murder when we have strife and envy. Jesus said anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

Abortion is a common form of murder among believers. We have joined the world in thinking there is nothing wrong with it. Doctors in churches enrich themselves by performing abortions. Acts of actual murder take place among believers. One day, I finished preaching in a church and a young pastor from another church approached me. He was devastated by an unfortunate situation in his church. A couple in the church had an argument and his senior pastor was invited to their home to calm things down. When he arrived at the house, the argument was heated and the man took a knife to stab his wife. He missed his target and instead stabbed and killed the pastor who was trying to restrain him. These kinds of stories among believers are enough to let us pray for the modern day Church.

16. Drunkenness – hard drinking, the use of alcohol that leads to unacceptable behaviour.

Alcoholism is finding its way into the Church. Believers misquote portions of the Bible to justify their drinking habits. They argue that they can drink alcohol in moderate quantities without getting drunk only to end up becoming drunks. Abstinence is the best way to escape the bondage and destruction of alcoholism.

One day, I was having lunch in a restaurant when a brother who was a friend

approached my table. He observed I was drinking a bottle of soft drink and he asked me sarcastically whether I still drink soft drinks. I answered in the affirmative and his next comment followed. He said soft drinks belong to children. I then asked him what he drinks and he said wine. He gave me a free lecture on how he believed wine was good for the heart. I am a trained pharmacist and I definitely did not need that lecture. There are food supplements and good medications for the heart and wine is not one of them. The problems alcohol produces are far more than anything it promises to offer. Remember that the Bible says wine is a mocker (Proverbs 20:1).

The use of tobacco and other addictive substances is gaining ground among believers. Preachers, musicians and those who perform on the stage use performance- enhancing substances. I heard a preacher confess that there was a time in his life when he injected himself with heroin to embolden him to preach. We must not replace the Holy Ghost with dangerous substances.

17. Revellings – riotous feasting and letting loose.

Believers use birthdays, graduations and funerals as excuses to organise riotous parties. The consumption of alcohol, sexual promiscuity and strife occur in revellings. Some believers who cannot patronise nightclubs on the streets find a subtle way of bringing them into the church.

In the attempt to entertain ourselves, believers import worldly music and dancing into the church. I attended a believer's birthday party where worldly music was played. People of the opposite sex paired up, took to the stage and displayed provocative forms of dancing. The lyrics of the music were romantic words that made some in the audience a little nervous and the kind of dancing that accompanied it was not good for sound viewing.

The works of the flesh we have discussed above are the characteristics of a church with poor church hygiene. Paul said those who do these things cannot enter the Kingdom of God. According to Galatians 5:19-23, good church hygiene is not just the absence of the works of the flesh but the abundance of the fruit of the Spirit.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

We saw early on that the works of the flesh are the “efforts”, “occupations”, “labour”, “toils”, “deeds” of the body and human nature. Galatians 5:22 says “*But the fruit of the Spirit is ...*” The conjunction “But” which introduces the fruit of the Spirit means the constituents of the fruit are in direct contrast to the works of the flesh.

The word “works” – Greek, *ergon* , meaning toil, effort, occupation, labour – with reference to the flesh means some effort is applied for the works of the flesh to manifest. They don’t just happen – we do some deliberate things for the sins of the flesh to show up.

The word “fruit” – Greek , *karpos* , meaning pluck – has a very interesting meaning. It means “to pluck”, “take by force”, “catch up”. As we saw in the case of the works of the flesh, the characteristics of the Spirit don’t just appear in the believer’s life. We pluck them or take them by force. Intentional actions like meditation, fasting and prayer and fellowship with the Spirit make us bear the fruit of the Spirit.

1. Love – affection, dear.

Love is the selfless disposition of putting others before yourself. It is the ability to show benevolence towards others. Love is the affection toward others that makes us lay down our lives for them even when they don’t deserve it. A solid church is rich in the love of God. Nothing makes a church stronger than love.

Our ministry, Fountain Gate Chapel, got to a certain point where we were struggling to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Pastors were divided in their ranks and formed factions. Our church was a contaminated one. In 2006, the Lord laid the message of “the love revolution” in my heart and I began to preach it. Before long, the message had saturated our church and other branches of the Fountain Gate Chapel. The wave of restoration that accompanied the message brought healing to the ministry and today we are a stronger body of believers. Though we still grapple with some things here and there, there is a remarkable change. We are ardent campaigners of “the love revolution” and I recommend the message of love to any church that wishes to be solid.

2. Joy – cheerfulness, calm delight.

Joy is the delight and supernatural gladness that comes from our benefit and profit in Jesus Christ, leading us to praise God. Joy does not depend on external circumstances. Hardship and persecution have the tendency to depress congregations but the joy of the Lord makes believers strong.

Joy is different from happiness. The latter is circumstantial but the former is a supernatural thing. It is amazing to see churches in difficult places praising and thanking God. Churches in impoverished places sing aloud and dance to the praise of God. I have been to many churches in villages in Ghana and their enthusiasm in worship is an embarrassment to city dwellers who live in comfort. Believers under great persecution thank God for being worthy to suffer for His

name's sake. The loudest praises come from prisons. The deepest joy comes from the pit of incarceration. The true worshippers are in places where it is forbidden to mention the name of Jesus.

3. Peace – set at one again, quietness, rest.

The word “peace” comes from the Hebrew word *shalom* which means salvation and deliverance. It is a sense of completeness, wholeness and contentment. Peace is stillness and quietness of the spirit and soul. It is a state of orderliness in a person's life. There are many people in churches who don't have peace with God. A good number of believers don't have peace within themselves. The absence of peace with God and the lack of internal peace make it difficult for believers to have peace with one another. Troubled relationships exist in many churches and homes.

There is a certain manifestation of peace I see in the Body of Christ. Cases of death and other tragedies hit families and churches and one may fear that everything will fall apart. However, time and again, I see God's grace keep the ministry intact and His peace secure the affected families. God's peace reigns in the midst of chaos. We survive things unbelievers cannot handle because of the peace of God, which passes all understanding.

4. Longsuffering – patience, fortitude, even tempered.

Longsuffering is the ability to bear with something for long. It is the grace to wait for the appointed time. Impatience causes a good number of believers to become patients in the hospital of spiritual casualties. Emulations, strife and seditions are the products of impatience.

A well-known man of God preached for many years without a breakthrough in ministry. However, when his time came, he exploded. He testifies that when the season was right he preached the same messages that nobody listened to previously and people's hearts were on fire. Today, his church is a household name. We must be patient in waiting for the results of ministry. People who want quick results in ministry use dubious means to obtain results and end up disgracing themselves and disappointing their followers.

5. Gentleness – excellence in character and demeanour.

It means “to be seemly”, “pleasing in appearance”, “conforming to acceptable standards of behavior”, “suitable” and “becoming.” Courtesy and good manners are necessary tools in creating a solid church. Gentleness reduces the offences in a church and promotes the healing of emotional and spiritual wounds.

The church is made of people who respond to things at different rates. Whereas some are quick to follow the vision others are slow to catch up. A pastor should study people and try to know how to handle them. Some members are very sensitive and any rough way of dealing with them drives them away from the church.

I remember, one day, I called a brother who is extremely shy to the front of our church and gave him a word of prophecy. In the word, the Lord asked him to serve Him better because he had a bigger potential. I did not see it as an embarrassing prophecy but the brother thought otherwise. He reacted by not coming to church frequently because he felt embarrassed. I had to use a gentle approach over a long period of time to bring him back into attendance like before. I was not gentle enough with the prophecy but my second attempt by gently pulling him along worked.

6. Goodness – generosity, beneficence, benevolence, charitable to others.

Goodness has to do with stretching oneself beyond convenience in order to be a blessing to another. It is not a careless passing on of one's surplus. Goodness is the means by which believers extend God's blessings to others. A solid church is filled with grace because members reach out to others and generously supply their needs. The hardness of heart towards others breeds discouragement in them when their pain becomes unbearable.

We must seize every opportunity to do good to people. I have been able to live in the northern part of Ghana and do the work of the ministry there because of brethren who allow the fruit of goodness in them to flow towards my family and me. They avail themselves for God to use them to supply our needs. I have uncountable testimonies about how God uses members of the Body of Christ to bless me and support my ministry.

7. Faith – persuasion, reliance, belief.

The word "faith" in the fruit of the Spirit actually means faithfulness, fidelity and trustworthiness. Faithfulness is an indispensable tool in building a solid church. No organization or family can be built without faithfulness in its members. Three main areas of faithfulness are required in believers. These are faithfulness in little things, faithfulness in money matters and faithfulness in the things that belong to others.

Our ministry has been in existence since 1987. When we started, our detractors in the city predicted that we would not last a year. We resolved to be faithful to God in every way. We committed ourselves to fasting and prayer.

Holy living was foremost in our lives. In the area of finances, we were faithful to God. I personally, refused to build a house for my family until we had built the church auditorium, offices and schools. My wife and I also helped the church to purchase many parcels of land in different locations. My family built and moved into our house only in January, 2012, which is twenty-five years after I had founded the church. Our members have been committed to God and the ministry in similar ways. This is the reason why we have been able to survive in the northern part of Ghana and spread the ministry to the rest of the nation and beyond from there.

8. Meekness – humility.

Meekness is submitting to God's will without resistance and resentment. The quality of meekness is disappearing from the Church at a fast rate. Believers are motivated by pride and ego to do things in the Kingdom of God which God does not send them to do. Others rebel against God and God-ordained leadership when they fail to have their own way in the ministry.

Many church splits are the result of pride. If leaders are willing to humble themselves a little bit they can minimise the divisions in the Church. Several years ago, we had a situation in our church in which some pastors felt aggrieved because they thought I had undermined them in some ways. One Sunday, I came to church to address the issue. The leaders thought I was going to rebuke the pastors and defend myself against their accusations. On the contrary, I knelt down before the church and apologised to the pastors. While I did that, they just stared at me. I rose to my feet after the apology and went on to preach the Word of God. In spite of my apology to them, a couple who were pastors left the church and travelled abroad never to return. Another pastor who refused to submit to the directives I gave him for his operations injected some of the members with toxic ideas and broke away with them to form his ministry. My apology did not stop these pastors from misbehaving but I believe it minimised the damage. Sometimes a leader may have to refuse to fight back. He must remember that associate pastors have nothing to lose if the church goes down.

9. Temperance – self-control, self-restraint and continence.

Good hygiene is impossible without self-control. In the natural we cannot maintain good health without a sense of discipline. We must control our habits and desires to avoid disease. The same logic is applicable to spiritual hygiene.

Provocation is a constant thing in church and that makes temperance an indispensable quality to possess. A leader must be careful not to over react to

provocation otherwise he will destroy the ministry. When I was the chairman of our ministry, we suffered a few “breakaways” with pastors and their leaders wanting to take their churches and all properties. In all the cases I advised the International Presbytery to allow them to go with the properties they wanted to take with them. Some of the pastors who broke away were so bitter that I knew we could not fight them without destroying the ministry. We must always remember that we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

The absence of the works of the flesh and presence of the fruit of the Spirit in believers leads to healthy churches. Good hygiene produces sound health. A healthy church has distinct features.

THE FEATURES OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

The features of a church that pleases God are shown in Ephesians chapter five. In this Scripture reference, the apostle Paul likens the Church to a wife and Jesus Christ to a husband. He drew a parallel between the good features of a desirable wife and the Church that pleases Jesus Christ.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Jesus Christ sanctifies and cleanses the Church by washing it with the water of the Word so it will have the great qualities of a bride that glorifies Him. The features of the healthy Church Jesus Christ seeks to present to Himself are listed to inspire us to attain to them. Every local church and ministry must replicate these features.

A glorious Church : the healthy church is gorgeous, splendid and honourable. It reflects God’s character and represents Him in a befitting manner. A glorious church does not bring shame to God’s name. It is impressive to the spiritual senses of those who see it.

Not having spot : Not having a spot means not having a stain or defect. It also means not defiled. A spot is that which is visible to the eye. It represents the

faults of the church, which the world sees and as a result accuses us of hypocrisy. Galatians chapter five says the works of the flesh are “manifest.” To “manifest” is to be publicly known or apparent. A spot appears on something when a foreign substance makes contact with it. Spots are the sins that come into believers’ lives and defile them.

Or wrinkle : wrinkles are the emotional, spiritual and physical changes that take place in believers when they go through trials and temptations. Some of the wrinkles that occur in believers are fear, depression and oppression. Wrinkles are the things that are sensitive to touch or feeling. God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

Or any such thing : “any such thing” refers to things that are related to spots and wrinkles. Examples are tears, burns, deformations, rust and shrinkages. “Any such things” may not be sinful but they limit us and give us discomfort. They shrink our capacity and limit our results. Poverty, sickness, ignorance and the lack of spiritual power could be classified under this category.

Holy : to be holy is being consecrated or sacred. This is a spiritual thing. Holiness is a spiritual state our spirits bear witness to. The Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. We may not see that we are holy or feel holy. We know it within us. When something is holy, it is set apart. God sets believers apart for spiritual purposes. The world tries to dispute our holiness because of their false judgment. The carnal mind cannot determine what is holy and what is not.

Without blemish : to be without blemish is to be without blame or rebuke, to be faultless. Blemishes or blame are audible to the ear. A healthy church does not offend in word. It is sound in judgment and wise in thought. The world does not stand in judgment against a church that has no blemish. It is beyond reproach.

A solid church is a glorious church. The churches we build should be solid and glorious ones. Thousands of churches spring up everyday around the world. The question that arises is what kind of churches are we building? Is their quality glorious enough to please God? Are they solid enough to withstand the wiles of the enemy and the test of time? We have looked at several aspects of a solid church in this book. A clear image of a healthy church should have been embossed in our spirits by now. It is not an easy task to build a solid church. This spiritual mandate needs total commitment on behalf of those who are called to engage in it.

If I am asked to mention one requirement for building a solid church as

presented in this book, I will single out obedience. Obedience is needed in leaders and followers alike to build a great organisation. Many of the setbacks we see in homes, businesses and churches are the result of disobedience. We shall conclude this book with the all-important subject of obedience.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SECRET OF OBEDIENCE

The Oxford dictionary defines obedience as compliance with an order, request or law. It is submission to another's authority. Obedience is a fundamental requirement in any house or business. It is impossible to build a solid ministry without obedience. We cannot have one leader and one vision without obedience. Attaining one Spirit is impossible without obedience. The keys of the Kingdom cannot be applied without obedience to God's commandments. Without obedience the works of the flesh gain total dominance over the saints.

Many people do things that are convenient to them. They don't act to please God or anybody. Obedience may demand acting in a manner that pleases someone but not you. It sometimes involves doing things you don't necessarily understand. The kind of obedience that pleases God is that which carries out a command promptly. Delayed obedience is disobedience.

Jesus Christ was not ambiguous in His demand for obedience from those who heard His words. He was clear on the terms on which His disciples could follow Him. His instructions included the benefits of obedience and the setbacks of disobedience. In one of His admonitions to His hearers, He likened the hearers of His words to builders. He said those who obeyed His words were like wise builders who built their houses upon the rock while those who disobeyed them were like foolish builders who built on the sand.

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus Christ said the rain descended, the floods came and the winds blew. Together, these three assailants of nature "beat upon" the house that was built on the rock as well as the one that was built on the sand. The houses did not invite

the rain, floods and winds. They imposed themselves on them. The builders had no control over the agents of nature. What they had control over were the kind of houses they built and their locations. The wise man's house that was built on the rock survived the assaults of the rain, floods and winds but the foolish man's house that was built on the sand collapsed.

The rains, floods and winds of life test every building.

These three forces descend on every building while it is being built and after its completion. They are the things that come to us or happen to us over which we have no control. Sometimes we don't invite them – they just come. Disease, financial setbacks, natural disasters, tragedies, persecution and demonic attacks are some of the rains, floods and winds that blow our way. The surest way to survive these forces is by working the Word of God into our lives. Total obedience to God's Word is the secret to survival in these times of unprecedented trials.

The Message translation of the Bible says the rain poured down, the river flooded and a tornado hit. It goes on to say nothing moved the house that was fixed on the rock. On the other hand when the storm rolled in and the waves came up, the house that was built on the sandy beach collapsed like a house of cards.

24 "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock.

25 Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

26 But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach.

27 When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

Matthew 7:24-27 (The Message)

Another interesting rendering of this Scripture reference is found in the Amplified Bible. It describes the wise builder as a prudent and practical man who built his house upon the rock but referred to the foolish builder as stupid. It is not enough to be anointed with power. Being prayerful is not enough to build a lasting house. Prudence is key to building solid churches that can withstand the

rains, floods and winds.

24 So everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them [obeying them] will be like a sensible (prudent, practical, wise) man who built his house upon the rock.

25 And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a stupid (foolish) man who built his house upon the sand.

27 And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great and complete was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24-27 (Amplified Bible)

A solid church is one that is built on the rock. In the early days of our ministry, we worshipped in rented premises and other properties. After a series of ejections from a number of places, I encouraged the church to build a permanent place of worship. We acquired a piece of land and undertook a building project. Due to the lack of finances we used mud to build. On the first night of the project after we had raised the mud walls to a height of about five feet, a torrential rain descended on it and brought it down. We did not build the house on the sand but our building material was bad. There was no difference between us and the foolish builder in Matthew Chapter seven. Poverty made us “foolish.”

One can be considered a foolish builder for using good material to build his or her house on the sand or for using inferior material to build on good ground. On the other hand, one is deemed a wise builder if he or she uses good material to build on a good ground. Building ministries and churches is like building physical houses. The principles involved are similar. These principles are the secrets builders employ to build structures that stand the test of time. Architects and engineers know the secrets of building.

Jesus said those who heard His words and did them were wise builders but those who heard them and did not do them were foolish. The secret to building a solid church is obedience. The builders follow the building procedures even if they don't fully understand the scientific basis of everything they do. Builders don't always like what they are told to build. The owners of buildings determine what is built because they pay for it. In spiritual terms Jesus Christ is the owner of the Church. The pastor is merely the builder and he must follow instructions.

He has to build the church on the revelation of the Word of God.

Apart from obeying God, the pastors and leaders of churches should obey those under whose supervision God puts them. Leaders should not break the rules of an organisation in the name of obeying God but not man. God gives delegated authority to men and a church that does not understand the principle of obedience cannot stand.

17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Hebrews 13:17

Every denomination has its own set of rules. It has a constitution and regulations that govern its churches. If you belong to that organisation you should be humble enough to follow the laid down rules. Some pastors insist on doing things their own way in the denomination and by so doing cause confusion in the system. Such acts of disorder lead to church splits and court litigations.

Several years ago, I had three youth and children's leaders in our church at different periods whom I was compelled to remove from their positions. These leaders insisted on doing their own thing. They tried to use our youth and children to fulfil their own visions. The level of ambition in them was so much that they could not fit into our mode of operation. They eventually left the church and started their own ministries. A solid church is one in which leaders are accountable to and defer to others.

God is glorified when His people execute His plans. He is pleased to see His children take charge of Kingdom business. To obey God, the Body of Christ must have the resources to fulfil God's purpose. We may be willing in our hearts to obey God but that is not enough to make us do God's will. The anointing without adequate resources makes it difficult to fulfil God's plans. In order to fully obey God, believers must have the required spiritual and physical capacity.

THE ABILITY TO OBEY

Thousands of believers are pure in heart and have good intentions but they are not able to build the kind of churches God wants them to build. Many pastors fail to fulfil their vision though they are very prayerful and holy. It is common to see God use some people who may not be as pure and religious as others.

One day, I was startled when the Lord told me He does not send His people to do some assignments because they don't have the ability to fulfil

them. God uses unbelievers for many assignments simply because His own people don't have the means to obey Him.

Jesus used individuals who were not as spiritual as His disciples to meet His needs. For example, He sent them to bring Him donkeys, which belonged to a stranger so He could ride into Jerusalem. In this assignment, He told them that if the owner asked them why they were untying them, they should tell him the master had need of them. The disciples did what Jesus told them to do and "straightway" he released them.

The disciples did not have the donkeys, so Jesus depended on someone who had them. The stranger obeyed when he had the opportunity to do so. If he did not have the donkeys God would not have instructed him to release them. Believers underestimate the importance of having the physical things and abilities that are necessary to fulfil God's plans.

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

Matthew 21:1-3

Unbelievers sometimes help the cause of the Gospel when the believers don't have the ability to do so. They have the power, knowledge and wealth that are needed to propagate the Gospel of the Kingdom. The people we don't regard as being spiritual enough have the resources the very spiritual believers don't have. A man who was not associated with Jesus made his house available for the Last Supper. Joseph of Arimathaea had the new tomb in which Jesus was buried. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, brought the spices that were used to embalm Him. It is common in local churches to see the very spiritual believers sit on the fence while those they don't regard as being spiritual do the Kingdom business that moves the churches forward.

Peter qualified for Jesus to instruct him to give Him his boat to sit in and preach to the crowd because the former had a boat. If Peter did not have a boat Jesus would not have commanded him to lend it to Him.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the

word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Luke 5:1-3

God gives His people the power to get wealth so that He will establish His covenant. Without wealth, some aspects of God's covenant are difficult to fulfil.

18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:18

The people of Israel obeyed Moses' command to bring gold and other materials for building the Tabernacle – they brought materials, which they already possessed. They could not have given the materials if they did not have them.

20 And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses.

21 And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD'S offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments.

22 And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto the LORD.

Exodus 35:20-22

The pastor of a church should do well to raise businessmen and skilful individuals in the church. Doing this empowers the members to obey God's commands to execute His purposes. If a church has no men and women who have the resources to get things done, God may instruct others outside the fold to do His will.

We have just considered the situation in which believers don't obey God because He does not command them to do so due to their lack of ability. Another reason believers don't obey God is the lack of faith. Faith is a key requirement for obedience.

THE FAITH TO OBEY

God sent Elijah to the widow of Sarepta, a city of Sidon because she had the faith to believe the word of the prophet. There were many widows in Israel who had oil and flour but probably lacked the faith to obey the command to make a cake for the man of God. The widows of Israel were too familiar with Elijah to obey his instructions.

25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

Luke 4:25-26

The widow did not have an abundance of resources but had enough faith to believe God. Believers in a solid church are givers. They respond to the Word of God by practising giving and receiving. Churches that don't have faith or the grace for giving and receiving are usually weak and lack impact on the community. The apostle Paul commended the Philippians for their obedience in giving and receiving.

15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:15-19

The faith for giving and receiving is a form of grace. Some churches have more of this grace than others. It is imperative for churches to pray to God for this grace without which a church struggles to survive. I had a chat with two friends on a flight to London some time ago. One of them said his church abounded in the grace of giving so much that at a prayer meeting he had to restrain them from obstructing his message. While he was preaching the members came forward in droves and poured offerings onto the platform. At a point, he stopped them from giving so he could continue preaching.

The other pastor said his members usually respond to offerings with some amount of hesitation. He has to admonish them over and over again to give. I refused to contribute to the discussion because the situation in my church could not meet the standards the two men set. The first man's church had the grace of giving, the second struggled to give and our church is faithful in giving but the economic difficulties in our Region makes things difficult for the people.

It is important to state that a church does not have to be rich in order to have the grace to give. The churches of Macedonia in the apostle Paul's time had the grace of giving in spite of their "deep poverty." The apostle urged the Corinthians to learn from their example.

1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

6 Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

The hall of faith in the book of Hebrews contains great testimonies of individuals who fulfilled their purpose. They did so by faith. Knowledge, finances, human assistance and other factors are important to fulfil purpose but none of them is as important as faith.

Faith is the supernatural ability to depend on God to do His will. The Bible refers to faith in Hebrews 11:1 as an intangible force that produces tangible results. The intangible Word created the universe. In the same manner your faith in the Word of God creates a solid church.

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Hebrews 11:1-2

Hebrews 11:2 says by faith “the elders obtained a good report.” Modern translations of the Bible render this statement in ways that are easier to understand. The Philips New Testament Bible says, “***It was this kind of faith that won their reputation for the saints of old.***” Your faith defines your reputation. A solid church has an impeccable reputation.

1 Now faith means putting our full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see.

2 It was this kind of faith that won their reputation for the saints of old.

Hebrews 11:1,2 (Phillips NT Bible)(emphasis mine)

The Message Bible says, “**the act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.**” If you want your church and ministry to be distinguished from others and be set above the crowd you have to exercise faith.

1 The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.

2 The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

Hebrews 11:1-2 (The Message) (emphasis mine)

Abraham's life provides one of the greatest manifestations of faith. He left his father's house and went in search of a city whose builder and maker was God. This city had foundations and was totally secure.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:6 -10

A few things stand out in Abraham's practising of faith. He is the father of faith and his life demonstrates how faith works to produce results. Unbelieving leaders cannot build solid churches. The following are some irrefutable facts about faith:

~ The indispensability of faith.

Faith is absolutely necessary. It was not possible for Abraham to do what he did without faith. You cannot build a church according to God's pattern without faith. A solid church as portrayed in this book is not an easy thing to build. It requires an unusual display of faith.

~ The irrationality of faith.

Faith is not logical or reasonable. Abraham moved in obedience to God though

he did not know where he was going. In another demonstration of the irrationality of faith, he believed God and had Isaac at the age of ninety- nine. **FAITH HAS NO BRAIN** – it is a spiritual thing.

~ **The insensitivity of faith.**

Insensitivity is showing or feeling no concern for others' feelings. Faith is not proud or wicked but positively insensitive. Abraham left his father's house without consulting the feeling of his family. He did not care about what the people felt or said. He dwelt in tabernacles as did Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. Nobody enjoys living in tabernacles and moving about from one place to the other. Abraham ignored any protest from his family members. The patriarch did not ask Sarah or Isaac for their opinion before he attempted to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. A pastor who always seeks the consensus of the congregation and the approval of the board cannot build a solid church.

~ **The incoherence of faith.**

Something is said to be incoherent when it is incomprehensible, confusing or not consistent. Abraham dwelt in a strange country in which his actions confused those around him. His life was not consistent with the people he lived with. He could not understand their ways neither could they understand his. A church can only be solid if it does not allow the world to rule its conscience. Churches that seek to conform to the world die with time.

~ **The inadvertency of faith.**

Inadvertency is achieving things or obtaining results without deliberate planning. Abraham "looked for a city, which hath foundations, whose builder, and maker is God." This city was a miraculous provision that did not come through budgeting and planning. Budgeting is good but a solid church is the result of the miraculous acts of God.

Faith as a requirement for the fulfillment of purpose makes the fulfillment of purpose possible for everybody. Education, wealth, racial advantage, geographical location, sex, physical stature, age and other factors are not as important as faith. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him regardless of their background.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

Some of the pastors of the local churches of our ministry, Fountain Gate Chapel, have found it impossible to build solid churches as a result of a lack of faith. They failed to learn from the example God gave us by birthing our ministry in Bolgatanga, in northern Ghana where I live. Our church in this town, considered to be the poorest political regional capital, has refused to succumb to the stigma of failure and misery associated with the land. It has spread throughout Ghana and other parts of the world. In view of the tremendous impact the church has made around the world, I expected all our pastors in other places to exercise faith in God for breakthrough ministries. Unfortunately, some of the pastors refuse to be inspired by our example and resort to complaining. They blame their inability to build solid churches on their geographical locations and spread the spirit of bitterness and murmuring to their congregations. Victims of a spirit of bitterness are stifled in growth and they can't make any impact where they are.

THE AVAILABILITY TO OBEY

Some believers and churches don't obey God simply because they are not available for God to give them any orders. They use one excuse or the other to stay far away from any source of godly instruction. Out of selfishness they engage only in activities that benefit them directly. A church that is filled with self-seeking individuals cannot grow into a solid church.

Jesus used the story of the invitation to a great supper to illustrate how people refuse to obey God because of their personal aspirations. Some churches don't obey God because they have their own agendas. Their visions have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. They pursue the things of the flesh to the detriment of the souls of their members.

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Luke 14:16-24

The excuses of the invited guests to the feast were varied. The first man asked to be excused because he had bought a piece of land and was going to inspect it. The second invited guest said he had taken delivery of five yoke of oxen and wanted to put them to use. A third man snapped that he had married a wife and could not come. After this elite class had snubbed the host, he hauled in the poor, crippled, lame and blind from the streets and lanes of the city. The servants raked the highways and hedges and compelled guests to fill the available space.

Pride was the hindrance to the potential guests' response to the feast. They turned the invitation down without any respect. God ignores proud people and uses the humble ones. He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

1 Peter 5:5-6

Jesus Christ demonstrated the highest level of humility and obedience when He came to the earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice for our redemption. He did not do His own will on earth but the will of the Father. Through the act of unrivalled obedience Jesus Christ obtained a name above every name in heaven, on earth and under the earth.

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind

let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:3-11

A solid church shows Jesus Christ clearly as the exalted Lord. It shows Him to the world as being highly exalted by God. It boldly declares that He has a name that is above every name. A solid church is confident in the revelation that at the name of Jesus every knee bows, of things in heaven, things in earth and things under the earth. It compels every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The subject of obedience brings us to the conclusion of this book. Obedience is everything. All the spiritual things we have said about a solid church in this book are useless without obedience. God has called believers to build solid churches and not weak ones. As we saw in the beginning, a solid church is a church, that is established on the foundation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Ghost and which is built by the Word of God into a body that functions efficiently, bears fruit and possesses the ability to overcome the attacks of the gates of hell.

A solid church makes impact on earth by being people-focused and God-pleasing. It has one leader and one vision. One Spirit inspires a solid church and it grows together towards the attainment of the ultimate goal: attaining the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Building a solid church is a

challenging task but it is encouraging to know that Jesus Christ declared that He would build His Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. We have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and therefore we are not intimidated. Armed with the secrets of good church hygiene and obedience, believers in Christ are set to build the most solid churches the world has ever seen. This book is a tool that could contribute insight into the kind of churches we should build and how to build them.

The world is witnessing the emergence of great churches that are making global impact. Souls are pouring into these churches as Jesus Christ is reigning in their lives. Building churches is not business for financial gain and showmanship as the world would have us believe. Men and women of God are inspired by God to establish God's agenda on earth. The words of the prophet Micah are being fulfilled in our time.

1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Micah 4:1-2

May God's grace abound towards us as we participate in the execution of His plans and purposes. The times in which we live are challenging but exciting. We are a chosen generation for church explosion and we cannot shirk the responsibility. God will approve our work at the judgment seat of Christ and our reward is certain.

LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE.

###END###

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Pastor Eastwood Anaba is the Founder and President of Eastwood Anaba Ministries (EAM), headquartered in Bolgatanga, Ghana. Eastwood Anaba Ministries is dedicated to repositioning God's people through REVIVAL for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Pastor Eastwood is a revivalist with an uncompromising message on the Holy Ghost, Righteousness, Discipline and Order in the Body of Christ, with a powerful emphasis on the Love of God.

He has authored 56 books including God's End-Time Militia and The Love Revolution. He and his family live in Bolgatanga, where he serves as the Senior Pastor of Fountain Gate Chapel, a people-oriented and missions hearted ministry.