

FEED MY SHEEP

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“ So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep,” (John 21:15-17).

Human tendencies, human frailties and human excesses are not limited to the contemporary day; they are as old as man himself. God’s calling, God’s anointing or God’s appointment are not a security against human failures or human disappointments. The evidence of the hands of God on a vessel is, as a matter of fact, sufficient reason for extra watchfulness. *“Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered”* (Zech 13:17). In principle, the point man is the target of the enemy. That being as it may, many reasons abound while God’s point men from antiquity have tendencies to make the same and similar mistakes all over again. God’s calling opens a man up to God’s anointing. God’s anointing brings authority and power. And this is true. A man anointed of God is a man that wields tremendous authority and power. But power itself has its own problems. The natural man forgets so quickly that whatsoever is conferred by God or whatsoever endowment from God, are all a work of Grace. This leads to oversight, carelessness, presumptuousness, assumptions and above all watchlessness. Signs of decay in the life of God’s chosen vessel evidences in different ways. And the landing pad for the enemy attack is either found in the man’s strong or his weak point (s).

The entrance for the enemy to bring failure in ministry is either through your strength or through your weakness else it will be through the area of your need because the three are all closely linked with the heart, either in its conscious state or in its subconscious. We can pick men of Bible contemporary days for our example and admonition. Aaron, Moses, even father Abraham. We should talk less of Samson. Paul's admonition is very enlightening and instructive if only as a guide for God's men of all time. He said, "...*what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord... and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ...*" (Phil 3:7-8). Paul recognised that a man chosen of God can be floored through his strength, his weakness, his success, his failure, what he has and what he does not have. His antidote is expressed in his thoughts when he said, "*this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 3vs.3-14).

The present meditation focuses on Peter and some other disciples of Jesus. These have been with the master for at least three and a half years. They had been taught. They have identified with a vision and a purpose. They have been groomed for the leadership challenges and the responsibilities that were to await the birth of a new order. This is talking about men who were to usher in a new dispensation. They were part of the new dispensational developments until their master was crucified. While the master was with them, they have enjoyed the miracles, the glories, and the joy of being their master's friends and confidants. Now, he was no longer to be physically present among them on a regular basis but this was not without his having prayed for them and committed them unto the care of his Father. Ever before the master's ascension, wariness began to set in. Peter and his brethren got terribly attacked by coldness of heart and blurredness of vision. Hear Peter, "*I go a fishing*" (John 21:3). This is nothing but an evidence of spiritual decay. The vision has run into crisis. And what a danger to be in leadership position?

For though in one sense, he was an equal with his other brethren, in another sense, they all looked up to him as a leader. This is clear from their response, “*we also go with thee*”!

How readily a man can turn from being “*a fisher of men*” (Mt 4:19) into being a “*fisher of fish*” just as readily as he became a fisher of men in his encounter with the Lord. It is pertinent to note that in Mt 4:vs 18-19, Peter met the Lord in a unique encounter. There was a clear, unambiguous calling. For three years and above, he had been a powerful minister. He had been part of the glory of twelve sent out in two(s). He had witnessed the demonstration of power and anointing as demons obeyed them. Peter was among the disciples who in their own words after a successful missionary outreach, reported from the field, “*even the devils are, subject to us through thy name*” (Lk 10:17). What joy and what ecstasy can follow such a successful outing. But the Lord cautioned, “*in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because...*” (Lk. vs. 10:20). The Lord was right. There is a difference between “*acts*” and “*ways*”. *Acts* can be deceptive, *ways* results from personal dealings. We need to add nothing to bring about *acts* yet we can quickly attribute the glory of the *acts* to ourselves. But *ways* are time-tested and time-dependent. They are products of time of successful and consistent processing in quiet obedience and cooperative submissiveness. Memories of *acts* are short-lived but experience from *ways* leaves impressions behind that are more lasting. God “*made known his ways to Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel*” (Ps103vs.7).

For Peter, it was a night fraught with misfortune and frustration following a misguided decision to go a fishing. They toiled all night but they caught nothing. What a deep lesson? To toil outside of divine counsel, no matter how good the idea sounds will result in unproductive, empty, fruitless and wasteful endeavour. Sometimes, there may be some physical evidence of success, but the true measure is in the amount of spiritual fruit- either by way of growth or by character. Any spiritual success not tied to visible character- evidenced by life and by testimony - is not a true spiritual success. Miracles, healings

deliverances or physical number counts are not in any way evidence of spiritual success. This is the lesson to be learnt from Mt 21 vs. 19. Here was the case of a fig tree that was found *“in the way”*. The sight of this fig tree was attractive because it looked prosperous at a distance. It *“flourished”* right *“on the way”*. But when the Lord came close to it *“and found nothing thereon, but leaves only”* he said, *“let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away”*. It is evident that the Lord would not have expected fruit on this tree if it was not the right season for this tree to bear fruit. This short story is prophetically instructive. A fig tree without fruit and yet found strategically *“on the way”*. This tree finds a first level of fulfilment in the natural Israel as a nation. But the natural Israel herself is only but a shadow of the spiritual Israel. The story of the fig tree is only an illustration of a supposed to be spiritual people who evidence all signs of spirituality on the surface but are lacking in fruits. But, *“ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them,”* (Mt 7 vs. 16-20).

There is something about having a vision. As soon as Peter *“felt led”* or *had “a vision”* to go a fishing, there was available everything to make the vision real. First, there were ready-made disciples. Second, there was a ready-made ship. Third, there was ready-made water to fish in! These are all clear evidences of *“the Lord confirming the vision”*! Things began to work *“immediately”*. In the eyes of Peter and his men, it was a worthwhile venture because everything seemed to be working out very well. However, some silent, not so vocal, not so loud, not so evident signs abound that showed that God was not in this business. One, the season was in the night! This did not ring a spiritual bell in Peter’s heart. Two, they toiled all night without a catch. Said in another way, they laboured without a fruit that *“abided”*. This did neither ring a spiritual bell in Peter’s hears! Three, Jesus was not on the shore of the waters where they fished. This was a terrible disaster. It is rather humbling. Every vision can be well defended and as a matter of fact,

any “*spiritual man*” will have enough evidence to justify that God sent him on his chosen course.

Fine, at least there is the evidence of disciples, besides, we can see the ship, the organisational structure, successfully in place and there is “*water*” to fish in. But are these sufficient reasons to prove God’s acceptance? Are these sufficient reason to identify God with the source of the initiative?

When it was morning, “*Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus*”! (John 21 vs.4) Is it not most shocking that after three and half years of close acquaintance, his very disciples could not recognise their own master? In just matters of days of separation? This is to reveal the divine mind about the people and what they were found involved with at this material time. As much as God was concerned, Peter and his men were working in blindness and contrary to His Counsel. If it was so bad that they could not recognise or know Jesus, who or what then would they recognise or know? Does this not suggest something like a need to check it out again? Because it can be a very thin line between Divine approval or non-approval.”

Then Jesus saith unto them, children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No,” (John 21:5). That was going straight for a kill! If they were right and correct in what they were found doing, they should have meat to eat! By this time, they had toiled! But spiritually empty, unfed and having nothing to eat! Motives to serve can be sincere. Desire to feed others may not be less sincere. But in all our toiling, do we have meat to eat? Are we well nourished spiritually ourselves? Do we have all it takes for a correct spiritual sustenance? Correct meat is the total counsel from the mind of God which is able to guide and lead a spiritual people to the promise land of milk and honey. Personal ambitions and desires may be good, but it is more worthwhile to be able to reach our spiritual promise land - the place of the fullness of divine character, nature, power and glory, the place of total victory over all the created universe both in the realms material and immaterial. The land of victory over all defeats and failures. The land of ruling and reigning with Christ.

“Children, have ye any meat?” Remember, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” (Mt 4 vs. 4). “And he said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find,” (John 21 vs.6).

There can be a wrong side as there can be a right side of the ship! The matter is not because the net had been all along floating on the “*left*” side while the fishes were swimming on the “*right*” side of the ship. The matter is being or not being in God’s will, mind, purpose, and in God’s divine timing. The matter is either doing or not doing the right thing according to God’s assessment. The ship may be correct in general concept but the application, how we relate to it from the perspective of divine eyes and divine mind may be wrong. A word can be right in the natural sense of being right, but what is the source? If the source is right, when is it to be applied? All bother on spiritual details that demand having God’s mind and not being presumptuous basing our judgements on our previous experience(s). Peter and his friends were all spiritual men. They were so “*spiritual*” that they knew what the Lord was “*leading*” them to do - to go a fishing! How easy to make a wreck of our calling by mere presumptions thinking that we are spiritually correct but not knowing that we err in judgement.

“Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea,” (John 21 vs.7). Was it possible for peter to be “naked”? Peter, naked? At the level of his spiritual exposure? Does that not teach that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: A GOOD UNDERSTANDING have all they that do his commandments; his praise endureth forever”. (Ps 111 vs.10). A deep lesson that can be learnt from this Psalm is the fact that to be able to do the Lord’s commandments, to be found doing God’s will, to have our ways acceptable to him and to be found not having our own righteousness but his alone, a sound understanding of his ways must be demonstrated. This is not a one and for all time apprehending of his understanding, it is to be an experience in a present continuous manner. How well important for us to know that there is a need to be sure that we are in God’s will on a daily basis. Being In God’s will yesterday does not automatically guarantee being in God’s will today. May we be so conscious as we walk with God.

CHAPTER TWO

LET US HUMBLE OURSELVES

“And the other disciples came in a LITTLE ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes,” (John 21 vs.8). There are pertinent lessons from Divine mind which we must be willing to learn from this passage. It is clear from 1Cor 15 vs.6 that Jesus had above five hundred disciples at the end of his earthly ministry; of this above five hundred was the seventy that were once sent out in two(s). Of the seventy was the twelve. Among the twelve we had Peter, James and John to be disciples of no mean stature. But Peter, James and John were among the seven choice men who went *“a fishing”*. Looking at the calibre of Peter, James and John; there should be no reason in this world to suppose with the faintest idea that it could be possible for these spiritual men of note, to make a wrong spiritual judgement. Zedekiah the son of Chenanah was so sure of who he supposedly was, that he did not hesitate to smite the obscure prophet, Micaiah on the cheek saying *“which way went the spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?”* (1 Kings 22 vs. 24). How can any associate Peter, James and John with wrong spiritual judgement? It may not be wrong to say such a one *“be anathema..”* (1Cor 16 vs.22). It is not going to be too much to say that there was already a division among the disciples along certain lines. Most obvious lines of division included that of *“spiritual rating”* or *“spiritual placement”*. May be the *“other disciples”* could not be said to be on the same *“spiritual pedestal”* with Peter, James and John. Another line of division was in the vision, hence their less vocal and visible participation. Peter, James and John among the majority of seven had a *“super”* vision of going a fishing. This vision must have no doubt resulted from hyperactive, *“let us be found doing something”* kind of disposition. There have to be some activities to fill the gap! Things cannot continue to be cold without us doing something! We have to serve the Lord. There has to be visible evidence

that we are serving the Lord. We must have to help our mind. *“I go a fishing. We also go with thee!”* But the less visible, *“the less spiritual”* and *“the less vocal”* *“other disciples”* did not feel persuaded about this vision hence a division.

Does this suggest that each time there appear to be a division in a body of a supposed to be spiritual people, it is because something fundamental is wrong? Peter, James and John with their brethren had their ship *“two hundred cubits”* from land. Being *“two hundred cubits”* from land suggests man is involved. Man is but limited and insufficient without God! Any vision which is either all man or a little man and a little God is doomed to fail. If man can just lean on God and learn to *“wait”* and be less in a hurry, how much will men save themselves from confusion and frustration?

“And the other disciples came in A LITTLE ship” (John 21 vs.8). Whichever way the matter is assessed, there was nothing that can give the slightest thought in the natural that these other disciples with the little, insignificant ship could be right in their decision not to be part of the fishing business. But *“the little”* they had was what the master needed at the right time. The little ship came to the rescue in the hour of crises. It is almost always the little that the master needs. It may be *“but a little oil in a cruse”* (1kings 17 vs.12) or *“a little cake”*(vs13). It can also be *“a little water”* (Gen 18 vs.4; 24 vs.17) or *“a few little fishes”* (Mt 15 vs.34). Why? Because *“a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked”* (Ps. 37 vs. 16). Zechariah prophesied, *“for who hath despised the day of small things?”* (Zech. 4 vs.10). The *“littleness”* of the ship is not what makes it God. But the lesson is in the fact that, *“my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Is. 55 vs. 8-9). It takes an extra patience, and walk in God’s thoughts and in God’s ways. Restlessness in our souls are a quick way to walk out of God’s ways but if there is anything that the natural man has, it is restlessness. The tendency is always to justify spirituality with the act of doing.

“So when they had dined Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” (vs. 15a). This question no

doubt was an embarrassment to seal the nervousness of Peter's disappointment in himself as manifested by his thoughtless leap into the sea of Tiberias stark naked – at the slightest thought of the reality of Christ's sudden and unexpected appearance on the Scene.

What stupid assurance the natural man in Peter would have pumped into him! Sometimes the natural man can just decide to be stupid. Even when there are evident conflicts of voices within and even when a voice of discomfort within seems to get louder and louder announcing the Father's disapproval of our ways, the ego of the natural man seems to pump some confidence to cause our rebellion to linger. Who said Peter, James and John could not be wrong? Who said they had the exclusive custody of the mind of God flawlessly. Is it not pride to keep doing what we may be found doing without constantly checking out with the Father of lights before whom nothing is veiled to be sure we are still found doing His ultimate will and purpose? For evidence abound that the most spiritual of men have their human limitations- man is all frail! We saw it in Moses, what of Elijah who was made to believe in himself that he was the only "*Remnant*" of God in the land? But said God, "*yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him,*" (I King 19 vs. 18 – NKJV). If it must be said, the more we seem to be spiritual, the more we need a constant, a regular checking out with God. One common malady in seeming spirituality is presumptuousness coupled with ego. A man is at the height of deception once he is over taken by this. One fail-safe divine arrangement is to find a constant corporate expression among men and women of common trust, confidence and spiritual experience to whom we can submit ourselves in a seeming unwritten covenant relationship. This is besides our submitting to the Spirit and the principles of God's word on a regular basis. The greatest mistake and the easiest way to fall, not by overt sin necessarily, is to be an island of spirituality in ourselves and be a visible "*point-man*" for then even those who can stand to correct us will shrink backwards "*less I offend the trust*" or "*less I be guilty of casting an aspersion*" or "*less I be the exception*". It is costly to be our brother's keeper but true love is in not having a "*sacred cow*" in matters spiritual.

We must always be willing to be open to public and private correction by our brethren for God can choose any means and any way to bring us

to our correct sense. On the other hand we must be willing to take responsibility to correct one another for thus counsels the scriptures. Paul openly indicted Peter.

He did not spare him at all although by every standard Peter should be “*head and shoulder*” taller than Paul if we must relate to the natural sequence of things. Peter was actually in the top three that related with his master when the Lord was in his earthly ministry. Besides, when the Lord rose from the dead “*he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once...after that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles; AND LAST OF ALL HE WAS SEEN OF ME ALSO, AS OF ONE BORN OUT OF DUE TIME. FOR I AM THE LEAST OF THE APOSTLES, THAT AM NOT MEET TO BE CALLED AN APOSTLE, because I persecuted the Church of God,*” (1Cor 15 vs.5-9). This was Paul’s own testimony, his humble rating of himself standing in comparative measurement with Peter. But hear Paul rebuke Peter publicly in his disapproval of Peter’s diplomatic handling of spiritual ministry. “*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas was also carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that THEY WALKED NOT UPRIGHTLY ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no man be justified. But if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid...*” (Gal.2 vs.11-21).

Earlier on in vs. 9, Paul acknowledged Peter as one among those who seemed to be pillars, yet Paul did not spare him over an act which he termed DISSIMULATION. There was nothing like respect of man in this matter. Peter was humble enough not to fight Paul or to feel, who is

Paul to say such things? Peter could have said, *“We knew when he was born again, since when has he become an apostle that he could begin to confront me. We taught him the rudiments of the gospel. Or some of us were too big for him when he got born again, we delegated one brother Ananias to go minister to him. We nourished and brought him up. How Paul has become full of himself!”* Humble brother Peter said none of those things. Apparently, Paul did not even treat him with any special respect in the eyes of those young gentile Christians. Paul? This is too much, at least revere brother Peter a little. Call him Apostle Peter or Rev. (Dr) Peter or Bishop Peter or Senior-Apostle Peter or some pseudonym so Peter would not feel be-little in the eyes of these young Gentile converts! *“But when PETER was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face”!*

Holy Father, in thy great mercies, speak to our hearts so that in this our day we may be healed of this our terrible malady of ecclesiastical title craziness so that it can be easy for us to submit ourselves even to the babes in Christ if need be for we should be at least willing to do anything to save our soul *“for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and loose his own soul?”* (Mk 8vs.36). There is this evil that stealthily crept into the Church, first into the evangelical mother Church before the Pentecostal daughters and grand daughters. It is the evil of titles. It is so bad that someone feels he is belittling *“a man of God”* if he addresses him simply as Brother Tom! No, that will not be giving honour to whom honour is due. Some zealous flocks will even go as far as bundling away some unschooled of the lot of Shimei, David’s good friend, if they attempt to address their Rev.(Dr) general overseer as Brother Paul. The man of God himself will not as much as acknowledge that one who cannot be counted for serious as having talked. What a terrible malaise has crept into your Church dear heavenly Father. *“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”* (Jer. 9 vs.1). How much we have helped ourselves to destroy ourselves in a most terrible state of deception. Oh, that we may be healed of our stupidity and be able to soar in the clear heavens of simple walk of faith which was first delivered unto the saints which can only be by the simplicity that is in Christ. We find it so easy to pray *“in the name of Jesus”* but if someone addresses us by some other than to

include our fondly loved ecclesiastically acquired appellation, we will feel somewhat strange and withdrawn on the inside.

Why will you not accept to be simply called by your first name or at best by the biggest title conferred by scriptures- "*Brother Samuel*"! Any other way is nothing but the mark of idolatry.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" God's spiritual scale of measurement is on the basis of love. Love here is comparative love. It is speaking of love in relative terms. It is not matter of not loving "*these*". The matter is, "*lovest me MORE than these?*" Our love for him is expected to rank first or rank highest. The glory of our love for him is to cause to appear as shadows our love for other things. As truth is to darkness so is our love for him supposed to supersede our love for any other, including for ourselves at WHATEVER COST. The words of the favourite song that well expresses our expected commitment of love, in the place of consecration, to the master are ringing in my heart and I write:

*When I look into your holiness
When I gaze into your loveliness
When all things that surround become shadows
In the light of you
When I count the joy of reaching your heart
When my will become enthroned in your love
When all things that surround become shadows
In the light of you
I worship you, I worship you
The reason I live is to worship you
I worship you, I worship you
The reason I live is to worship you*

CHAPTER THREE

LORD GIVE US FRESH ENCOUNTER

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs,” (John 21 vs.15). It can be humbling when the Lord allows us to reach that height for that which our soul lusts after or reach the end of our life’s ambition and then bring us down to the dust of humiliation. This is what has happened to Peter. He toiled for fish. The Lord intervened and caused him and his colleagues have fish to the full to humiliate them. You have all the fish, then what next seemed to be the question.

A great many times, it is so easy to wrap our ambition under the cloak of spirituality. Peter was a spiritual man no doubt. The words of peter could not be treated lightly neither could his judgement be considered with doubt. This is why *“I go a fishing”* by Peter could not have been taken otherwise than the mind of God and his brethren submitted to the idea without further questioning. The Lord seemed to say *“Peter, even if James, John, Thomas, Nathanael and two others decided to go a fishing so soon, they can be pardoned, but why you?”* This is because the Lord seemed not to be bothered by the action of the others. He turned his attention squarely on Peter. Why did he? This is because earlier on Peter had proved at different times that he had understanding about the plan of God. At a particular instance, the Lord relating to Peter’s revelation said, *“and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...”* (Mt. 16 vs.19).

These keys relate to a pioneering insight and entrance into the mind and purposes of God for the Church of Jesus Christ (the kingdom of heaven). How would the same Peter, upon the foundation of whose revelation the master was to build his church, become so soon shaken in his mind? Peter had always had revelations. He had the revelation that

Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”*. But this time he had another kind of Revelation which propelled the *“I go a fishing”*.

And Christ will not rebuke any of the other disciples involved in this wonderful vision of fish business that bother on activities of the mind and dead works. Rather, he turned to Peter and said, *“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”* This is the first time ever that the Lord will associate Peter with his natural earthly parenthood. It suggests nothing but a state of broken covenant - apostasy is the true word for it. Peter got the message, he quickly responded *“yea. Lord; thou knowest that I love thee”*. That sounds laughable. The two words *“love”* in the same verse of a question and answer session do not come from the same original meaning. Christ used the word *“Agapao”* while Peter used the word *“Phileo”* in the same expression for love. The two words are miles apart. Jesus was asking Peter on a matter that bothers on God’s kind of love, pure love, love that has life in itself, love that is able to beget love, divine love for that matter, the kind of love that puts your life on the line. Love that can sacrifice without upbraiding. Herein is divine love made manifest, *“for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his LOVE toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ “D-I-E-D for us”! (Rom. 5 vs.6-8). John said, “herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1John. 4 vs.10).* In comparison Peter expressed the kind of love that related to emotion, love that is to be associated with feelings, love in the head and not in the heart. It is love that is short-lived. It is temporary. It is not to be relied upon. It is evident that the two- the Lord and Simon- are not discussing at the same level. Peter understood the import of the Lord’s question; he was not beclouded nor was there any iota of doubt in his mind as to the depth of the master’s question.

“He saith to him the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (agapao) thou me? He saith unto him, yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (Phileo) thee,” (vs. 16). The matter is that the Lord who is all knowing knew the mind and the state of Peter and what calibre of **“love”** he had.

While there was a quiet rebuke that was raised by the import of the master's question, there was also an admonition to bring Peter's kind of love through divine processings to God's kind of love.

The double emphases in asking the same question again was not only to cause to dawn properly on Peter where his love was standing, but it was to also pass a deep lesson across, of the kind of love that transcends the love for personal goals, ambitions, desires, fame, self-life and self-preservation. This kind of love alone will make us see as God sees and do what God is doing and make our will to conform to His. Paul said, *"to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe,"* (Phil 3 vs.1). For Christ to say the same thing to Peter again, it was indeed not grievous, but for Peter, it was safe.

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (now-Phileo) thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time lovest (phileo) thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (Phileo) thee ..." (vs. 17). Peter was just being sincere as well as being humble. He was before his all knowing master before whose eyes nothing can be hidden. When John saw him later in the spirit he saw his eyes as a flame of fire, (Rev 1 vs.14). Besides Peter wanting to be sincere with himself, there was something that could also not be controverted. There was no amount of love in the heart of Peter in this present state that could measure up with God's kind of love. Christ the example of love was here standing. He was himself Love personified. Peter could only tremble in his presence and Peter's love can only be hatred in the presence of Love personified. But when Christ identified with Peter's love (Phileo) in his question the third time, Peter broke down. He became grieved, that is, distressed, sad, sorrowful and regretful of or sorry for his state. This was a double tragedy.

His master for whom he thought he had left all things now identifying him with a two-fold identity that related to the natural state. *"Simon, son of Jonas.... Lovest (Phileo) me more than these?"* What can be more devastating or more debilitating than this confrontation with as much as the truth as well as with the reality. This is Truth personified in whose presence every other *"truth"* becomes untruth! When a man is

confronted by Truth personified, what remains but to melt and to have his loins loosed?

When king Bel-shaz-zar of Babylon had a frontal encounter with the Truth, we understand that, *“the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that THE JOINTS OF HIS LOINS WERE LOOSED, AND HIS KNEES SMOTE ONE AGAINST ANOTHER,”* (Dan 5 vs.6). John came to the same reality in a fresh encounter with the master in his vision on the Island of Patmos. Hear John share his testimony, *“when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, fear not...”* (Rev 1 vs.17). John was believed to have written his three epistles after his encounter as recorded in the Book of Revelation. Little wonder why he had such an entrance into and wrote with such an emphasis on the subject of love. The love emphasised by the Lord was that which could have motivated Phinehas to thrust a javelin into the man of Israel and his medianitish woman friend who were part of the feast of Baal-peor. Following this incidence of Phinehas’ action, God said, *“Phinehas, ... was zealous for my sake... wherefore say, behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting Priesthood; because he was zealous for his God..”* (Num25 vs.3-13).

The Lord’s visitation to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias has a lot to teach about feeding the flock First he related this to love (agape). It is divine love, God’s kind of love, sacrificial love, love with the vision of God’s purpose in mind, love with the vision of God’s glory in view, it is love to feed the flock. This is what the Lord himself demonstrated by taking bread and fish and feeding his disciples. *“Jesus saith unto him, come and dine...Jesus then cometh and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise,”* (John 21 vs. 12-13). Earlier on he had asked if they had meat to eat. *“Then Jesus saith unto them, children, have ye any meat?”* (vs.5). The love which propels a shepherd to feed his flock relates to that of a father. Here he addressed his disciples and said, *“children, have ye...?”*.

Paul wrote and said, “*though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers...*” (1Cor. 4 vs.15). The present state of confusion of the disciples in the transitional experience they were going through which brought about the “*I go a fishing*” situation justified their being called children - spiritual children.

But what brings spiritual maturity is spiritual feeding of the children. This the Lord was demonstrating as he beckoned to his disciples to “*come and dine.*” After they have dined, then the lesson. The disciples needed to get the import of what he had done. Just as they, being spiritual children, needed to be fed so they could be strong, the disciples had, a responsibility-calling, which is to feed the flock so the flock could be strong and become mature. He related this act of feeding the flock to love (agape and not phileo). If “*phileo*” is the motivation to feed the flock, it will fail for the motive will have been wrong from the beginning. Phileo will have some immediate self-gain and self-benefit in view whereas, motivation by “*agape*” (God’s kind of love, love divine) is pure love for God, love with divine interest in mind, not feeding the flock because of any derivable benefits but because God’s glory is in view. It is the right motivation to feed the flock that obscures the sacrifices that are involved. To feed the flock according to Divine expectation takes great personal sacrifices. Not to feel the pain of these personal sacrifices must have been because God’s love, love for God’s glory, God’s kind of agape-love must have motivated the feeding of the flock. Careful examination of the Lord’s charge will reveal that he related feeding the flock to various categories of his people.

In vs. 15 when he said, “*feed my lambs,*” the word “*feed*” comes from the word “*Bosko,*” in Greek and relates to “*pasture*”, “*fodder*”, “*to graze*” “*to take care of,*” “*to guide*”, “*to lead*”, “*to defend*”, and “*to shepherd*”. Pasture is grassland and by inference means green or fresh grass whereas, fodder implies dried food for cattle. To graze is to eat. What is the Lord saying but that his shepherds have a responsibility motivated by agape to bring his “*lambs*” to graze both on pasture as well as on fodder. The fodder is the dried food which speaks of God’s word and the pasture is the wet food or the Spirit of God’s Word. To cause to graze on fodder and on pasture is to bring the whole counsel of God’s mind by the Spirit and by the Word to God’s “*lambs*”. This is to

be done by deliberate act of guiding and shepherding. It may involve leading away from danger and defending against danger. It involves the shepherd staking his life for the sheep. It reveals a life of commitment and dedication to ensure there is *“meat in mine house”*

The word translated *“lambs”* in vs. 15 is *“arnion”* in Greek and relates to the very young (not just young) of the sheep. This is speaking of that portion of the flock that requires to be fed with great care and tenderness. The very young of the sheep is not necessarily speaking in terms of physical age but it rather speaks of spiritual age and maturity. *“Feed (Bosko)”* my lambs (young ones in faith). In vs.16, when for the second time the Lord asked Peter if he loved him more than *“these”*, he then repeated the instruction *“Feed my sheep”*. The two words, *“Feed”* and *“Sheep”* are different from those used in the first instruction to *“feed my lambs”* in vs.15. The word *“feed”* is here *“poimane”* in Greek and it means to oversee or tend, or look after or take care of as a shepherd, feed as for cattle and govern. The word used to qualify the sheep is *“Probaton”* and relates to advancement with regards to motion, age or general progress, hence sheep- more mature of the flock of Christ. These are to be taken care of, fed, looked after, tended, guided, directed and taken oversight of on behalf and with the love (agape) of the master. *“Lovest (agape) me more than these? Feed (Poimane) my sheep (Probaton)”*

In vs. 17, for the third and final time, “he saith unto him, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, feed (Bosko) my sheep (Probaton)”. There is one lesson that must be learnt here. This is the fact that even the more mature sheep require the attention which the young ones are being provided. “Feed” or (Bosko) is applied both to the lambs as well as to the sheep in the Lord’s instruction to the man Peter. This “feed” my lambs-sheep injunction is without condition and yet it is to be motivated by love (agape). The “Feed” in the “Bosko” as well as in the “Poimane” is to be ALL FREE and at no cost to the LAMBS or to the SHEEP for “freely ye have received, (and) freely give” (Mt 10 vs.8). If we must obey the Lord, all

things which are freely received of the Lord must be freely given for “*a servant is not greater than his master*”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDOL SHEPHERD

“*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, feed my sheep*” (John 21 vs. 15-17). When for three times Peter was asked as touching how much he loved the lambs or the sheep, the Lord’s instruction to Peter each of those times was “*Feed my...*” The reference was to the Lord’s and not to Peter’s sheep. Peter was not put in doubt as to who owns either the sheep or the lambs. The Lord could have said either “*Feed the sheep*” or “*Feed your sheep*” during each of those encounters. But he said neither of those, rather it was “*Feed my lambs...or Feed my sheep*”. Along with this was the question, “*lovest thou me more than...*” On every count, the Lord’s basis of reference about the ownership of the sheep is very un-ambiguous. The unambiguous clarity about the ownership of the sheep is very vital in relation to both the sheep as well as to the servant-shepherd. In the present consideration, Peter is the servant-shepherd while the Lord is the master-Shepherd or just the Shepherd of the sheep.

Ownership determines the type of relation-ship and direction of allegiance. How the owner relates to his sheep is clearly different from how the servant to the owner should relate to the sheep because he is the

servant and not the owner. Perception as to the true ownership and what the actual roles of the servant to the owner should be in relation to the sheep may lead to misguided use of authority and power and unchecked exploitation of the sheep to the financial advantage of the servant.

Misconception of the servant as to his status in relation to the sheep has the inherent tendency to lead to a defrauding both of the sheep and of the owner of the sheep. Besides, the sheep can be used and be misused or be imprisoned inside the servant's denominational walls as spoils of war. This forms the basis of God's disapproval of the "Shepherds" in Ezekiel's contemporary days, using Ezekiel as his mouth-piece. Hear the Prophet, "*woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they where scattered. My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them,*" (Ez.34 vs.2-6). The reasons for God's unambiguous condemnation of the shepherds are evident. "*The shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves*"! Ezekiel spoke to the spiritual leadership of his time but much more, his words were not only standing in type, they were direct prophecy for the age which lay ahead of Ezekiel's contemporary day. The shepherds were accused of feeding themselves. Two levels of feeding themselves are here evident. One, the most wicked of the shepherds kills and feeds directly on the sheep. How is this possible? By either ministering death to kill the sheep's capacity to hear God and be sensitive to respond to him or not ministering God's word at all but ministering carnality. In this way they turn the attention of the sheep to themselves and be-spoil the sheep of their materials. It will not be strange to see the shepherds "*flourishing*" materially while the sheep struggle along to feed, hand to mouth. The widows are neither cared for nor comforted. The poor is treated as a lazy one who does not know how to "*bring*" to the house of God. Tithe cards or electronic data information on the sheep's tithes' position becomes an instrument to

separate between cattle and cattle. The cattle with fat title information are treated with respect and rewarded with titles or position. Such cattle feel honoured and in return has a reason to *“perform better”*.

If any of such cattle with strong allegiance to his shepherd begins to *“feel led”* to take steps towards redeeming his soul, he loses his respect which may include the withdrawal of all benefits: ordination and preaching license rights inclusive if they are there. God help such a sheep if he is not *“put under curse”*. It may be as bad. The second way in which the shepherds feed themselves may even appear more honourable apart-from the neglect of the sheep. This is by seeking various means to feed himself spiritually. They expose themselves to all available resources to make them better spiritually exposed but, to labour to cause the sheep to feed on anything other than will keep the sheep perpetually sub-servient, the shepherds will not. In this case, it is not the shepherd feeding himself which is evil, it is the selfishness and the self-centeredness which attracts divine attention. He feeds himself only to oppress the sheep the more. *“Woe to the shepherds who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?”*

“Ye kill them that are fed” This is either by direct oppression, or overturning the correct doctrinal position of the *“fat”* sheep for selfish reasons or by ministering the word that has no spiritual content to advantage the sheep. “The diseased ... not strengthened, neither.... Healed that which was sick, neither... bound up that which was broken, neither brought again that which was driven away, neither sought that which was lost, with force and cruelty have ye ruled them” This is the picture of a spiritually distressed condition. The ministry to the house which will not meet the spiritual, physical, material and social needs of the less advantaged paints a bad picture of God’s testimony. It produces grumbling, murmuring and groaning which are bound to be spiritually counter-productive.

“They were scattered... and became meat to all the beasts of the field” The sheep are in need. For some, it is a desire for more of God but for others, they have genuine spiritual problems needing divine

intervention. These will expose them to all sorts with all manner of claims to power and spiritual solution. The sheep's hope are raised to the level where the sheep are willing to "Pay" additional "offering" if need be. At the end, the sheep's hope may not only have been dashed, he will also have lost his money ("offering").

In this way the sheep in disappointment wandered away still looking for solution to his spiritual problem.

Experiences of the sheep may be so bad that they feel humiliated, badly attended to or totally unattended to, uncared for, spiritually dried and famished that they resign to fate. The condition of many of God's people are that bad. The shepherds cannot discern their condition as to know how to effectively help them because there is a wide ecclesiastical gap which exists between the sheep and thier shepherd. In some cases efforts by the sheep to see his shepherd can be so frustrated just because of the blocks designed by ecclesiastical bureaucracy to project the position of the shepherd's "kingly" authority. All manner of complications which are alien to the ministry of Christ are woven into the path of the sheep that the snares so formed to entangle him are stronger than the snares from which he was delivered by the reason of his salvation experience. Jesus said to the Pharisees and the Scribes, *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! FOR YE COMPASS SEA AND LAND TO MAKE ONE PROSELYTE, AND WHEN HE IS MADE, YE MAKE HIM TWOFOLD MORE THE CHILD OF HELL THAN YOURSELVES. Woe unto you, ye blind guides..."* (Mt. 23 vs.13-16a). Compassing sea and land to make one proselyte! Evangelistic campaigns across the nations with fantastic "report from the field"! To make proselytes? And then turn the same into twice children of hell than the scribes? Is it possible for scribes to be children of hell?

Beloved Brother Paul wrote, *"I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION: LEST THAT BY ANY MEANS, WHEN I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A*

CASTAWAY" (1Cor. 9 vs. 27). Brother Paul, could you be a castaway? You mean, there is something you needed to do to your body to keep it under and hold it in subjection? So that you would not be a castaway? Will that not make you little in the eyes of your sheep?

But hear Beloved Paul, "*know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. AND EVERY MAN THAT STRIVETH FOR THE MASTERY IS TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I THEREFORE SO RUN, NOT AS UNCERTAINLY; SO FIGHT I, NOT AS ONE THAT BEATETH THE AIR: BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY...*"

(I Cor. 9 vs.24-27a)

Jesus said, "*therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation*" (Mt 23 vs.14b). James admonished, "*my brethren, be not many masters (teachers) knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation,* (James 3 vs.1). Teachers or shepherds are supposed to be embodiment of knowledge of that which makes them teachers or shepherds hence examples and inspirations to the sheep. If the teachers by reason of selfish motives fail to rightly, correctly and adequately equip and furnish the sheep, to make them spiritually healthy and fulfilling in the overall purposes of God, the teachers are in danger of "*damnation*" or "*condemnation*".

"My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them" (Ez. 34 vs. 6). Reasons abound why the sheep wander through all the mountains and upon every high hill. The more mature, more spiritual are wandering in search of richer and more enduring spiritual food for which their souls are yearning and waters of refreshing which their spirits cried for. Their shepherds care less to labour to feed them. They are spiritually hungry and famished. They have continued to feed on one constant and monotonous food. They have heard this same story over and over again and their shepherds have no new thing to say to keep them from wandering. Meanwhile they have not been as spiritually equipped as to be able to reach out to God on their own individual standing in Christ. Their shepherds have been to them as Christ. Their shepherds have so displaced Christ in their lives

and have caused them to rest all hope, by design or otherwise, on the shepherds and not on Christ.

To make the matters worse, these poor sheep are bound to their shepherds by the “*Church constitution*” so that even the wandering through all the mountains and upon every high hill is at a great risk of facing the wrath of the shepherds. The sheep may be publicly repudiated for his “*acts of gross indiscipline*”. Beloved shepherds, turn those sheep loose, release them to graze on greener pastures if such pastures are beyond your reach spiritually. The great Shepherd will take good care of them. How pained and aching the heart of the great Shepherd when he thinks of the reasons for which some poor sheep are wandering. Some major reasons are either physical or material. And when you consider the number of the sheep that fall into this category, you wonder what their shepherds are feeding them with! Chaffs! Those sheep do not know how to look up to God and trust. They have not been taught what it means to wait in certain circumstances. They knew little about discerning the voice of God in their situation. They are looking for God because of their needs not because of hearts that are opened out to God because of who He is. Churches are populated by half-baked sheep who are incapable of laying hold on the joy of knowing and relating with the Saviour. They cannot see God in their situation neither can they exercise any individual spiritual strength to address their circumstances. Their shepherds must always pray for them before they feel assured. Their shepherds have to tell them who to marry and who not to marry, when to marry and when not to marry. Their shepherds must tell them when and when not to travel. They must obtain the permission of their shepherds as to what and what not business they can do. They must be licensed by their shepherds as to qualifications to preach. They must seek permission to attend another shepherd’s grazing field. The lives of the sheep are made to be so regimented and dependent on the shepherds that the sheep never know that there is a great Shepherd of the sheep who is over all, both sheep and shepherd! Those among the sheep who seem to agitate for freedom for individual expressive relationship with the great Shepherd are looked at with suspicion and, cunning and evil designs are devised to cage them or clip their wings. Those who refuse to be so suppressed are tagged “*rebellious*”. But free, these sheep must be for they belong to the great Shepherd and we all are his sheep! There

is only one fold and one Shepherd (John 10 vs.16). And may we know this truth so quickly for the great shepherd has his own great plans to free his sheep from the hands of the idol shepherds!

“Thus saith the Lord God; behold I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. For thus saith the Lord God; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out... THEREFORE WILL I SAVE MY FLOCK, AND THEY SHALL NO MORE BE A PREY”

CHAPTER FIVE

THESE WALLS MUST COME DOWN

When in John 21, the Lord gave to Peter a quiet but deep and open rebuke to cause Peter to rise to divine expectation in the place of adequate provision of “*meat in mine house,*” it is because this is a very vital aspect of raising disciples in His likeness. Feeding the sheep demands such attention because the Church can never attain to the expected perfection without the right environment of the ministry of the word that is able to “*make wise the prudent*”.

The Lord spoke through prophet Isaiah when he prophesied, “*he shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young*” (Is 40. vs.11). The Lord is here providing a prophetic example as to how the flock should be fed - like a shepherd! How does a shepherd feed the flock? Characters of a good shepherd will be to lead and go in front of the flock in order to identify safe pasture and ensure safe environment for the sheep. He recognises the lambs and carry them in his arm. The sheep that are with young he leads gently. This shows in the character of the shepherd a caring heart and ability for tender handling of the more tender of the flock. His heart is large in compassions. He shows great understanding for and he is willing to bear the infirmities of the weak, the discouraged and the oppressed. He is greatly accommodating. He will rather give to his sheep than receive from them. He is ready to lay his life for the sheep for that is his appointment. He has his staff but he will rather lean on his staff as “*for support*” as he watches the flock graze and feed with inner joy than to apply his rod on those harmless sheep. “*He shall feed his flock like a*

shepherd” He will rather die than lose any of the sheep to plague or to wolves.

David recounting his experience as a shepherd said to Saul, *“thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear...”* (I Sam. 17 vs.34-36a).

That is how much a sheep means to the shepherd. The shepherd is ready to die for the sheep and not the other way round. He will rather die than to loose a sheep to a wolf, however daring. And this is not seeking to promote strong ideals for *“safe denominational walls”* in order to keep the sheep under control. Rather, any one single sheep of the great Shepherd where ever he is found under the sun is a sheep to die for. If the vision of the shepherds is different, then there is a problem. When a shepherd cannot be at ease when *“his sheep”* is freely grazing in greener pastures beyond that which he can provide for *“his own sheep”*, such a shepherd is to be pitied. When a human shepherd supposes he has all it takes for *“his sheep”* to rise to God’s perfection of character, glory and power, and seek to define boundaries for *“his sheep”* by means of men’s constitutions, such a shepherd is nothing but outright wicked if not completely anti-Christ and anti-God purposes. All sheep must be free to graze freely within the great one fold under the great one Shepherd. What on earth should threaten the position of any shepherd? What thinkable reason will make true shepherds of the master feel jittery over possibility of losing *“his sheep”*; whose sheep is he protecting? His or the master’s? There is something dastardly evil about denominationalism. These evil walls must come down! God said, *“Jerusalem shall be inhabited as TOWNS WITHOUT WALLS”* (Zech 2 vs.4). Joshua said, *“cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city (denominational walls) Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it”* (Josh 6vs.26). Who is building these denominational walls of Jericho and who are those sustaining them? These walls stand straight against the purposes of God. And those who either are building

them or sustaining them are but anti-Christ and anti-God purposes. Denominationalism will never bring perfection in the Church. And this is not to recommend inter-denominational arrangements to achieve ecumenical false unity.

There is no alternative to men and women whose only identity is Christ, who recognise that there is but only one fold and one great Shepherd; this can only be truly accomplished by the workings of the Spirit and never through any arrangement of man. The Lord gave some series of parables in the Gospels to bring out certain vital lessons as to what the expectations are for his shepherds who he called stewards. He said, *“let your loins (loin cloths) be girded about, and your lights burning. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the Goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, SPEAKEST THIS PARABLE UNTO US, OR EVEN TO ALL? And the Lord said, who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom*

men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Lk. 12 vs. 35-48).

Men that wait for their lord... In the first of the above quoted parables, the shepherds were here likened to men that wait for their lord. That is talking about what the attitudes of shepherds should be. It is being made clear that the shepherds relate to a lord, a master and hence a reward. The emphasis here is in the ability to watch! This involves alertness that is not subject to the conquering forces and temptations of lethargy and apostasy. Alertness such that the shepherds are not asleep. Alertness as to discerning times and seasons and knowing what to be done or what is being done and when. This can only be possible by a consistent life in the spirit. For that alone will overcome the temptation of *“following the multitude”* or *“the tradition of the elders”*. A faithful shepherd has an independent standing in faith and he is able to hear and to see and know what his master is doing or saying or instructing. This is not talking about false claims of what *“the Lord is leading me”* to do when the Lord has not spoken at all. The only antidote against following tradition is a life in the spirit, for it is then and only then can we hear the master and know what he is doing and when he is doing what so that we can do likewise. It is unimaginable what the depth of disappointment if the Lord returning from *“the wedding,”* meets the men of the house sleeping; he hardly will be able to overcome his outburst of anger against such unfaithful men.

To forestall such a spiritual disaster, the Lord admonished to *“let your loins (loin cloth or girdle) be girded about, and your lights burning.”* For effective and successful watching, the loins or the mind must be made strong by reason of strong determination. The mind must also be made open to the Lord and not be sealed with tradition; tradition is anti-God, it does no good, it rather kills and destroys the man and works against the purposes of God. The centre of focus is the mind, if the lights must burn, and effective watching will be made. A mind which is not sealed with tradition is a mind which is open to the Lord. A mind which is meek, humble and contrite, is a mind which will be teachable. A mind that is girded and furnished by the word of truth and by the

spirit is a mind that will be progressive in the things of God. The loins girded about relate to strong moral character and the testimony of Christ. *“Your loins girded about, and your lights burning”*

There is nothing as pleasing to the Lord as a consistent life of harmony which exists between a man and his words, between a claim and the actual testimony. This is only made possible if a man constantly reminds himself that *“the Lord of the house”* will come, however delayed his return seems to be, and when he comes, he has reward for every man according to his work. *“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be”* (Rev 22 vs.12) *Blessed are those servants...* (Lk.12 vs.37). The same set of people that were likened to men that are waiting for their master are called servants in the next verse. The shepherds are servants. *“Servants of God”!* That sounds familiar. It also sounds big! Men love big names particularly in our local environment. The love for big names is the genesis of titles in the church. A great number of title appellations in the church are not Bible tradition. Men only try to help their minds to make up for a seeming lack in their lives to enhance a balanced ego. For instance, to be called a *“Rev.”* adds nothing to a man when it comes to the things of God, it can only subtract from him. It is not the title that brings the power or that establishes the rule of Christ in the earth. The men and women who dared kings and subdued kingdoms and have reckonings in the heavens are their simple selves, common men and women, who sometimes are weaker in their frames than the testimony recorded of them.

Jesus said, *“blessed are those SERVANTS...”*. The word servant as was used here does not translate to *“master”* or *“boss”* or *“Rev”* or *“Rev. (Dr)”*. It is *S-E-R-V-A-N-T-S*. In Greek, it means *“a bond-slave”*. And that is the greatest title which relates a shepherd to his soon coming master, who has his reward with him! A bond-slave has no rights of his own. His only appointment is to wait and to serve. It is a position of meekness and of humility. It is to be a solemn lesson for the self-life, for in bond-slavery, self has no place, and ego has no place. As a matter of fact, the position of the bond-slave *“is lower”* than that of the sheep, except that the bond-slave is himself a sheep. A bond-slave therefore is in no authority at all to ascend upon a throne over the house of the

sheep. When bond-slaves drop their humble title both in word and in deed, it is an act of direct rebellion against the master. It is a protest against their appointment as bond-slaves.

If men truly understand their calling as bond-slaves, they will perhaps be slower to hear and to say, “*God is leading me into full time ministry*”. That phrase, oftentimes than not, betrays the motive. It sounds good to think about being “*God’s minister*” in the present age!

In past ages, after men have counted the cost of being so appointed, the first reaction is “*I am not qualified*” and usually it requires God’s encouragement and release of grace for such ones to finally submit. And when they have submitted, what we see in them is always an heart of a bond-slave and this they see as a lifetime calling. No wonder, He who made them bond-slaves also backed them up with power and he is always jealous for them. He told Joshua, “*this day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel*” (Joshua 3 vs.7). God kept to His promise for in the very next chapter we heard, “*on that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they (all Israel) feared him...*” (Joshua 4 vs.14). Joshua did not have to adopt a title in an ordination meeting before the Lord magnified him. If only we can allow less of the soul man to interfere with the calling of God, what a beauty and glory we shall behold and how much shall we be magnified by Him who is to be feared! Nothing compares with God magnifying a man Himself. Not a million make-belief self-magnifying titles will compare with God magnifying a man! It cannot be paralleled if it is God and not us doing it. The glory cannot be controverted if it is God and not we making men believe it is God doing it. Not all the make-beliefs will bring God’s Glory. What the Church needs to day is deep repentance and a return to the Bible pattern and we shall behold His glory again, this time the way the world has never known or seen it before.

CHAPTER SIX

WHO THEN IS THAT FAITHFUL AND WISE STEWARD?

“Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?” (Lk. 12 vs. 41-48). The Lord had earlier likened shepherds to men waiting for their lord who is to return from the wedding and to servants (*doulos* - “bond slaves”). What the Lord was saying beat Peter hollow. It was overturning his theology. Peter, a man who had been so accustomed to the tradition of the elders! He hardly could wait for the Lord to conclude his series of thoughts in parables when he interjected, *“Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?”* It was as though the Lord ignored Peter’s question, but nay, rather than ignore his question, he answered by a third but much deeper illustration.

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward?” The word stewards translate to being a manager, an overseer, a preacher, a governor and a treasurer. The meaning sums up to being a custodian or a caretaker. The thought is in the fact of being trusted with something. It conveys the idea of an ability for skilful, organised, consistent, coordinated, coherent and en-graced personality for administration with a determined effort to be faithful - faithful in discharging the responsibilities and faithful in not overturning the rights of him who has so en-trusted. God’s manager coordinates, guides and directs with caring disposition and lot of tenderness. Man’s manager controls. The steward which the Lord is speaking about is God’s manager.

The temptation is always there for God’s managers to be turned into men’s managers - men who lord it over God’s people. They exercise control over the household. Jesus said, *“ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.”*

BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever shall be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (DOULOS - "BOND SLAVE"):even as the son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt 20 vs.25-28)

The word minister or diakonos in Greek or deacon as later used in the epistles does not belong to the chain of titles for God's servants. It addresses itself to someone who executes the command of others; in this case, the command of the flock. The correct order is for the flock to "command" their minister and their minister is in turn to execute the command. The reverse order is what the natural mind prefers and that is not Christ but the carnal man enthroned! "*Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant*" The word is doulos - a bond slave. This will bruise the ego of the carnal mind. If correct understanding of the solemn words of the Lord's Christ is here apprehended, the church will witness mass repentance and mass dismantling of organisational and ecclesiastical structures. Those structures have not served the purposes of God. They do no good to God's glory. The beauty of the Gospel of Christ is the meek nature of the Lamb which is not only projected but is in - worked into men by the instrument of the Holy Spirit so that men can attain to the image and the likeness of Christ. Of a truth, it was the LION of the tribe of Judah who had prevailed to open the Book, and to loose the seven seals thereof but when John beheld, what did he see? He saw a L-A-M-B standing, as it had been SLAIN-where? In the midst of the T-H-R-O-N-E! It sounds good to want to relate to the Lion nature but it was not the Lion that stands in the midst of the throne, it is the LAMB and that LAMB had been slain!

If we properly relate to the Lamb that had been slain, the pattern of ministry cannot but change to reflect the nature of the Lamb which had been slain! Stewardship is overseer-ship. God's overseer is not man's overseer. God's overseer guides and looks after to ensure that things are properly directed and done through the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Man's overseer is a ruler, a controller, a boss and a master. He is to be seen as being head and shoulder taller than the tallest. But that is not

God's pattern. Saul was a type of man's overseer. He was head and shoulder higher above every other person. And he so ruled. David was God's overseer. He was first trained to oversee sheep - in the wilderness and school of God's training. The heart of a shepherd had been worked into him through experiences to which he related. It could then be possible for him to tell his story of how a lion, then a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock. The shepherd-overseer heart in him jumped out after the duo, he delivered the lamb out of the lion's mouth and when it attempted to attack, the overseer-heart in David overpowered the lion and also killed the bear. It could not have been otherwise for God's true shepherd. God's true overseer-heart in David was that which God required for David to shepherd over his people, Israel. Said Samuel concerning David while rebuking Saul, *"but now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee"* (I Sam13 vs.14). Saul's failure was rooted in his heart. David's success was also rooted in his heart. As a man *"thinketh in his heart, so is he"* (Pro 23 vs.7). David was a man after God's heart, a man whose heart was fashioned after God's heart. God's heart is a shepherd's heart. *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd"*! God's heart is that of an overseer - a steward. God's heart is of a minister, he serves and executes our *"commands"* and does not feel little for it does not make him smaller than He is. To be an effective minister - that which carries out the command of others effectively and accurately is a sign of strength and not of weakness. David, a man after his heart! In stewardship is the sense of accountability. Whichever way stewardship is expressed, it must be seen to embrace the conscious principle of accountability. Accountability in the natural or in secular matters calls for caution and for faithfulness. It requires unquestionable wisdom. Spiritual accountability demands for more. Wisdom of this world talks about ability to scheme for selfish advantage. But the wisdom required in spiritual stewardship has everything to do with experience, knowledge, good judgement (ability to make right decisions) and prudence. *"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation (manner) his works with meekness of wisdom."*

The wisdom that is from above IS FIRST PURE, then PEACEABLE, GENTLE, AND EASY TO BE INTREATED, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, WITHOUT PARTIALITY, AND WITHOUT HYPOCRISY” (James 3 vs.13,17). Jesus asked, “*who then is that faithful and wise steward*”? Stewardship in the Lord’s address is here tied to the responsibility of the “*ruler*” appointed over the household. “*Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?*” (Lk 12 vs.42). The stewardship with the attendant faithfulness and wisdom all relates to giving the household “*their portion of meat in due season*”. This is talking of ability to do and ability to know. Ability to do relates to giving portion of meat; ability to know relates to discerning the right and the set timings to give what. The total idea is not in the ability to give portion of meat alone. The sense of judgement is also vital. To give a right portion of meat is one thing, when what is given is another. One cannot be made right while no effort is made to ensure the rightness of the other. All of God’s Word must be right if rightly discerned. A portion of God’s Word may be given at a wrong timing. There is something about God’s set and divine timings as they relate to the portion of meat which is given to his household. Speaking of faithfulness in relation with stewardship in giving portion of meat to the household addresses itself more delicately to the ability to know the set timing to give what portion. This relates to the emphasis of the Spirit at any given time. The greatest challenge that faces the Church that closes the present age is her ability to “*know*” what portion of meat to take her into the next age.

At a particular dispensation of God’s move as the Church was coming out of the dark ages, the portion of meat rightly given was that of salvation - the Just shall live by faith. While that portion of meat belongs to all time, a greater emphasis of the Spirit with attendant illumination rested on it more than any other portion of meat on a general scale at that material time. Then comes the emphasis on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Just a few decades ago, that portion of meat was greatly resisted by the greater majority in the Church. The benefits

that resulted from the rain of the Holy Spirit anointing have brought the Church so far.

It took faithful and wise stewardship to discern the move of God's Spirit and His area of emphasis in order for the Church to have been so blessed. There has never been a time the Church had, had to face the tremendous amount of challenge, that the Church which will round up his age will be made to face, than now. Probably the darkness could not ever have been darker than the darkness which is to round up this age. Similarly will no glory of God ever witnessed on the earth be deemed to have ever surpassed that which the Church awaits. What all these do suggest is nothing but the challenge as to the richness and the uniqueness of the portion of meat required to prepare the Church for empowerment to face the greatest challenge of all time, which lay but just ahead.

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth" (II Pet 1 vs.12). There is always a present truth with which the Church must be fed. The portion of meat for the past few decades is already evidently lacking in power in these closing days of time. This is reminiscent of a change in God's emphasis usually followed by a withdrawal of His hands into His Bosom, as it were, for a season. This divine act is for a purpose that the wise and the faithful stewards, knowing their times, may discern the operation of God's Hands, enter into His mind, and obtain the right portion of meat in due season - the present truth - for the household. This is the only way the Church can be empowered to be ready to move on to round up this age and progress into the next. The challenge goes beyond dwelling on the mountains of tradition - the name is mount Seir! *"Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?"* Lk.12:42.

"Whom his lord shall make ruler over his household" The ruler in this phrase is not to be construed as an autocrat who has been appointed to exercise rule, authority and dominion such as to be able to suppress any rebellion and instil fear in all hearts. This will be a wrong picture. The word so translated conveys the meanings: to designate, to constitute and

to convoy. Designation is appointment that yet awaits installation. This thought is confirmed when the Lord said, *“blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.” The installation as ruler is a reward of faithfulness in stewardship. Ruler ship is not the same as stewardship. Stewardship comes first, faithfulness is tested in relation to heart conditions, then comes the reward in ruler ship. In a similar manner, to constitute is to entrust with authority - delegated authority. It takes focusing of the eyes constantly on the Lord for delegated authority to be correctly appropriated. The word **“convoy”** conveys the idea of protection which is supposed to be a vital element in the character of a faithful steward.

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward?” The word faithful implies to be trustworthy, believing and true. Trustworthiness relates to the character of the steward. Believing speaks of faith and righteousness. *“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness”* (Rom 4 vs.5). To be true is to be consistent in relation to confession and testimony; in relation to profession and the life that is lived. Truth is the spiritual harmony between word and deed. The union between a message and the messenger establishes the truth conveyed. These elements of trustworthiness, believing (Righteousness) and truth are characters of faithfulness. Stewardship is acceptable to God if it is faithful. *“They that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful”* (Rev 17 vs.14). *“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”* (I Cor. 4 vs.2).

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward...?” The word wise means prudent, thoughtful, discrete and cautious in character. These are elements that come by determined effort as a result of unclouded vision and a goal. All these qualifications present the measurement of a steward in relation to giving of portion of meat to the household in due season. The whole essence of the Lord’s admonition in these parables is to provoke men and women to rise to the challenge of feeding his sheep. The matter of feeding the sheep is vital and central to God’s purposes. *“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so*

doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath,” (Lk. 12 vs.43-44).

I love to conclude with this song ringing in my heart:

*Awaken my heart, to love and adore thee
O my Lord Awaken my heart,
To pour out before thee, O my Lord
Awaken my heart to know thy love
And to love Thee in return
Freely flowing from
An awakened heart*

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